

This Old House

83
bargain buys
starting
at \$1

easy spring makeovers

- fresh kitchen ideas
- low-cost custom details
- uplifting color choices

**GET CASH
BACK!**
10 money-
saving
tax tips

BONUS PROJECTS

Cottage-style flower box
Handsome pet gate
Vintage keepsake storage

APRIL 2010

THISOLDHOUSE.COM



It only looks like the real thing. **Armstrong** luminase flooring



Natural Born Leader

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*Based on DOE test procedures and comparison with a 40-gallon standard electric tank water heater with 40% efficiency. Savings are for the GeoSpring hybrid water heater using 100% heat pump power.



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SET THIS
LOOK



SPRING MAKEOVERS

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HOME
SOLUTIONS

Let your
bathroom's
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by creating
a colorful
rubber duckie
display.



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ANIMAL
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ASK THIS
OLD HOUSE



home solutions

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in Kona and Maui.



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AZEK
Deck

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the study population. The data are presented as mean (SD) or n (%).



HOW I CAN'T GET ANY BETTER

Next month, look for tips on landscaping tough terrain, or visit www.rubied.com

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letter { from This Old House }

Let me out!

There's no arguing about it: I said to my wife, "We were two years into our remodel and out of savings, and I was feeling robbed." I said, from the best and-worst-appliance selection to the contractor with a con-man's way of selling you into extras and out of checks, the remodeling game seems to have way more than its share of supposedly criminal characters. "Except the homeowner—how often is the homeowner the victim?" I said. "Almost never."

Which is why I was so surprised when a pair of cops banged on our door at three in the morning with a warrant for my arrest.

My wife, awakened by the noise, came down the stairs. "That is highly irregular," she said. "Let me see the warrant." She spoke with the authority you'd expect from a defense attorney, which she's not, though to her credit she has watched every episode of *Law & Order: And Law & Order: SVU*. *And Law & Order: Criminal Intent*. One of the officers handed it to her. She glanced at it, then back at the cop. She said, "I have no idea what this means." The cop said, "Yeah, no other. Never seen that code before."

She looked at me as if to say, *Boy, you're really doing it this time. The cop slipped on the cuffs, and off I went.*

Truth be told, I figured it was all a mix-up. But it wasn't, and before long I was sitting in a cell between a parole-violating ex-con and a guy wanted for armed robbery. A sergeant finally came by and asked me, "What's the charge?"

"Don't you know?" I asked.

He said, "A wee guy, huh?" and reached for the paperwork. "Never seen that code before." He flipped through the Municipal Code book in his hand, dropped on a page, pointed, and said, "Oh, you're a hard case, you are." He gave me a cold stare. "Listen," he said. "You put trash in someone's dumpster, never paid the fee." The robbery suspect and the ex-con gave me deep looks.

It was another four hours before I paid my fine and got home to find my loving wife—*fast asleep*. "Weren't you even worried about me?" I shouted, waking her up. "I'm getting pinched by five-a-m, spending the night with perps in the big house, and you're on the outside under a down comforter, snoring loud!"

"Why are you talking like that?" she asked. "Besides, I looked up the code online. When I saw it was a fine for putting trash into a dumpster, I figured it was a mistake—you only take stuff out of dumpsters," she said. "That's



The editor came right in a person of his own making.

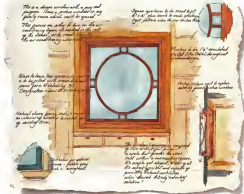
what you need to be arrested for."

It's true, I do like to garbage pick. But the cops had me dead to rights this time. I did put trash—an OJ container, eggshells, some junk mail—in a dumpster. It was one night in less of my house. It was full of debris from the demo my contractor was doing in my basement. Unfortunately for me, the permit for the dumpster I ultimately paid for was in the contractor's name. The junk mail wasn't, and some Boney Hills on the porch saw the discrepancy and wrote a scolding, and the rest is now legend. Or at least a good story.


 SCOTT O'MALLORY, EDITOR

PS Speaking of good stories—what about you? Do you have a tale of home improvement gone wrong? A yarn about some misadventure of remodeling, either? We at *This Old House* would love to hear it. And we'll put the best of them in our upcoming Reader Carrot Issue. Drop me a note at scott@thisoldhouse.com.

If you could design your dream window, what would it be?



myMarvin box

And thank

Sarah Sutcliffe FNA
architect/author, The Not So Big House series



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readermail

Safety is important to us and to our readers, so we take some space this month to respond to concerns about a product. At the same time, we had to grin at the adaptive inventiveness of a delightful Reader Project!

Vent-free fireplaces

From the editors: Several readers, including Mark Lorch of Nashville and Jon Brown of New York, write in to express concern about the safety of the next five fireplace options featured in Home Solutions (January/February), so we wanted to offer further information to consider if you're thinking about adding one to your home.

Any unvented combustion has the potential to create unhealthy indoor air quality—including acid, excessive humidity, CO, lead, and even carbon monoxide—especially in a house with a tight air envelope. So it's important that vent-free fireplace units be correctly sized for the room, installed and maintained by a heating pro, and used according to the manufacturer's guidelines. They are not meant to be a main source of heat and should

run for more than 3 or 4 boxes at a time. Same states, counties, and cities restrict or prohibit these, so be sure to check local codes. For links to more information, go to disability.com/consumer.

Competitions

• In Home Solutions (November 2006), we forgot to credit the radiator-cover window seat to TomKat Fine Woodworking. 973.443.0544. Our apologies for the oversight.

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us

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Kidding around

LAURENCE: See VITRAPHOL Case 10

I was inspired by Animal House [September 2009, left] to build the dog agility course for my dwarf goats, Elmer (right) and Fruddi a Fishy. They are great climbers and love to learn new tricks. When I finished the better today they knew exactly what to do: climb. It might sound easy, but your article was a life changer. We are totally addicted to agility now. Thanks for the fun!

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checklist (April 10)

EASY WAYS TO
IMPROVE YOUR
HOME RIGHT NOW

Upgrade your recycling center

Celebrate Earth Day (April 22) by replacing those haphazard bags and boxes you call a recycling center with something more space saving and organized. Buy stackable bins, sturdy rollout carts, or a 3-in-1 compartmentalized trash can. Then tune up on local recycling rules by visiting earth911.org.



Start seedlings

Green alacourtesy: Lie uncrowded up outside, but it's not too late to grow seedlings for your summer garden. Veggies such as squash and cucumbers can be established in a month or less. Start these fast growers indoors by filling a container 2 to 3 inches deep—a cardboard egg carton will do—with soilless growing mix. Plant seeds, pushing large ones in with a pencil. Cover with plastic and keep moist and warm till they sprout.



TOH TIP

Check your downspouts

Even if you cleaned your gutters right on schedule last fall, now is a good time to consider any your downspouts are still flowing freely before heavy April showers begin. Carefully run a metal rod down to the spout's elbow to clear any leaves, twigs and other debris that may have made its way inside.

Prep your mower for spring

1. Add new oil and gas. Fill up and new tanks with new, clean fuel for more efficient mowing.
2. Swap the spark plug. Replace this \$5 part to ensure smooth starts all season long.
3. Clean the filter. Wash out foam filters with soap and water; let dry. Replace paper filters.
4. Sharpen the blade. For healthy, clean cuts, sharpen the blade in a vice and file the cutting edge, following the angle of the bevel.



Put Easter egg shells to work

Don't let hard-boiled chicken eggs go to waste. Instead, boost the colors in your garden by crushing and spreading eggshells piece by piece in your beds. Just make sure to use food coloring on another vegetable-based dye to color the eggs.

What's on your checklist?

It's the planning that makes the difference. And it's the difference that makes the difference.

Kathryn A. Rugg, Executive Vice President of the House of Commons, Inc.



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NEWSFLASH

Turnout that dog bites account for one third of all homeowner insurance liability claims. And the average claim for a bite is whopping \$24,460! So remember to keep Fido in the backyard behind a fence—or at least on a leash.



Save the plants!

Last summer was no good for gardeners. The vagaries of weather and a rising population exploded the Rose of Sharon pest spread a fatal citrus disease down South, and the same fungus that caused the SADs perhaps found a home on tomato crops. In case the cool weather that bred these pestilences returns this year, here's how to protect your plants:

- Vigorously control weeds around your garden and use an organic insecticide.
- Get citrus trees from a reputable nursery or registered parent plant. Watch for blotchy, yellowing leaves and call in an expert if you see any.
- Spray tomatoes and other fruits with a fungicide for at least seven days.



CRACKS

New law targets lead safety

Cracking is great. But when it comes to working around lead paint, it's best to call in a professional. And a law that takes effect April 22 will help ensure that the pro knows what he or she is doing. From that day on, any contractor you hire to work on a home that has, or is suspected of having, lead paint must be certified by the EPA. Contractors will also be prohibited from using certain tools that kick up lead dust, and they must meet thorough cleanup specifications. While the EPA estimates the regulations will take homeowners by surprise, more than \$100 a job, some contractors say it'll be more like \$600 to \$1,500. For more info, visit epa.gov.

ENERGY

Energy use

The average amount of energy consumed per home in each year has dropped about 10 percent since The Old House TV Market survey in 1979.

Then
359 million Btu*
Now
27 million Btu
per household

*Based on natural gas or the amount of energy that would be required to produce the same amount of energy.



NEW TOOL

Help for the handy

The new Ornel 4000 rotary tool has variable speeds that range from a brisk 5,000 rpm to a glass-cutting 35,000 rpm. It's ergonomic design makes it easy to use, and it works with all Ornel attachments. So use it to cut, carve, route, grind, sand and polish to your heart's content. Starting at \$39, Ornel.com.



Exporting by
Curt Froelich and
Michele Rodriguez

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Ornel will buy slippers as a fashion statement.

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SEAL AIR LEAKS

Save \$350 a year by sealing air leaks.



homenews (April 10)

Here's another winner of our 2010 Best Old-House Neighborhoods contest



This Old-House
2010
Best Old-House
Neighborhoods

Thornton Park Orlando, Florida

> A nearby park makes it perfect for people with kids—or dogs
> Plenty of restaurants nearby
> Space Mountain is just a half hour away!

THE NEIGHBORHOOD Sure, it's just 25 miles from Disney World, but Orlando's Thornton Park offers amusements of a more sophisticated variety. Its European style commercial district of restaurants, pubs, and shops is where locals go to kick back. Dig deeper into the neighborhood and you'll find beautifully crafted non-sporting houses along brick-paved streets that are shaded by oak trees dripping with Spanish moss.

THE HOUSES Thornton Park is known for its wood-frame "cracker" style homes,

which feature center hallways and porches with long, overhanging roofs. There are also Craftsman, Mediterranean, bungalows, and shotgun houses. The interiors of many homes feature hand-some cypress millwork. A restored bungalow was recently on the market for \$215,000, but you can find homes under \$200,000 and up to \$700,000.

WHY BUY NOW? The neighborhood offers a stable housing market that's attracting young homeowners looking for a friendly, walkable community. To them, Thornton Park truly is a Magic Kingdom.



SOUTHERN COMFORT This single-story shotgun bungalow is typical of the homes in Thornton Park.

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home solutions

inside

SAFE LAWNS

VACUUM GUIDE

GREEN CLEANERS

MORE



▶ SMART IDEA

Build a bath display

Sherry Hart and Anne For us, Rubber Duckie, you've got one way better with something like a finished and one. With their fun, colorful look, the little squishies are just the kind of waterproof, unbreakable—and inexpensive—items that make a lively collection to array in a bath. Here, one flock perches atop narrow shelves while a larger hood paddles across the shower curtain, giving that family space a playful identity. We'll recommend a display of your own! See the shelves right by cutting down unframed post or poplar shelf kits from the home center, or make your own set of licks, nailing the ridge for a finished look. Got single brackets from the same material, attach to both hardware, then secure to the wall with screws. The result just ducks.

Everything you need for natural lawn care

Just consider the warning label. Keep out of reach of children. It's an every chemical fertilizer, pesticide, and herbicide out there. But the benefits of organic lawn care go beyond not having to lock up your stock. Using natural fertilizers, plant-based herbicides, and biological pest control creates a lively ecosystem in the soil that better supports turf grass, ultimately allowing it to withstand drought and disease without intervention—giving you a nice green lawn and the time to enjoy it. Here, natural lawn care expert Paul Hulse, founder of Soil Science.org, shares some of his go-to products. —SAL VUOLTA

1 **Care gluten meal.** Somewhat in early spring to help control weeds and be there with slow release nitrogen. About \$15 per 40-lb. bag. soilscience.org/sol.com

2 **Hand sower.** Great manual sower for a herbicide that will grow up weeds. For a big mix of bags, try adding time or select to the same. \$45. dewaters.com

3 **Red worms castings.** The natural soil conditioner is rapidly absorbed by soil microbes. Spread into easy-to-apply tea by shuffling it into a shaker that you push in a bucket of water for a week or so. \$1 per 4-lb. bag. earthscience.org.com

4 **Heel sifter.** Spread compost tea into a shoe and sifter by placing it in a rubber shoe in the tire of a wheelbarrow and use the heel of the shoe to spread the tea. \$30. earthscience.com

5 **Organic fertilizer.** Look for one that contains a combination of natural bone blood meal, and feather meal. \$22 per 25-lb. bag. soilscience.com. \$50 per 40-lb. bag. earthscience.com

6 **Beneficial nematodes.** Contain grubs with these microscopic organisms that target beetle larvae but are otherwise benign. Mix in water and spray onto the lawn. \$30 per pint (they come in a 100-pint bag). dewaters.com



7 **White clover seed.** Mix 5 percent of this "weed" seed into your grass seed and the clover will grow up to kill the weeds. \$7 per 4-lb. bag. gardeners.com



8 **Aerator.** Pull openings of soil in fall to allow water oxygen and nutrients to reach the roots. On a small yard this hand tool does a trick. \$15 for a long one. \$24. jenniferslaw.com



9 **Granular compost.** The concentrated organic mix goes down like a seed spreader in fall. \$4 per 4-lb. bag. earthscience.org.com



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+ HOUSEHOLD HELP

Nontoxic cleaners

For many of us, the sharp scent of ammonia is what really says clean. Problem is, that strong-smelling chemical and others, including bleach, can irritate lungs and eyes—and worse. To help you scrub safely, healthy-home expert Mary Findley, who's been cleaning homes in Eugene, Oregon, for more than 15 years, shares the nontoxic, no ammonia sprays, bottles, and tools in her bucket. —MARCH 2014

Sprays and Bottles

1. Plant-derived glass cleaner. Get a streak-free shine without airborne chemicals. Save with GreenSweep Natural Glass and Surface Cleaner. \$5 for 32 oz.; drugstore.com

2. All-natural degreaser. This concentrate is made with grapefruit seed and orange peel extracts to remove soap scum and cooking messes. Dilute it as required for the job at hand. *Bleekies All Purpose Cleaner*. \$9 for 32 oz.; acowise.com

3. Eco-safe surface protector. Use this UV backside for car and boat exteriors to cut dry-bristled wheel twice a year so that grime slides right off. The manufacturer says it'll also repel fingerprints on stainless steel. *303 Aerospace Protector*. \$22 for 32 oz.; cristina.com

4. Beehive furniture polish. Use this pet-friendly strength a couple of times a year to condition and protect both polished and unfinished wood. *Howard's Natural Wood Preserver*. \$5 for 32 oz.; dwellbetter.com

5. Enzyme-based disinfectant. Findley uses this pet stain and odor remover to sanitize tile or vinyl flooring in kitchens and baths. It's also great on carpet and upholstery stains. *Nature's Miracle*. \$12 for 32 oz.; petsmart.com

Tools

6. Flexible grout scraper. This flexible blade removes soap residue around faucets without scratching. Scrubbers Free pack of blades and holder. \$3; glaxiodex.com

7. Pool ring remover. This appropriate shelled polymer ring is made to remove calcium deposits on

pool tile, but it works away at most lime and hard-water deposits on porcelain tubs, toilets, and more. *Grout It*. \$12; shop.bluetone.com

8. Pet-hair remover. Findley uses this dry sponge to brush dust and lint from lampshades and fabric linings. It's also clean window screens: no water required. *Pet Hair Magic*. Pet Hair Remover. \$5; petco.com

9. Map with washable cover. Sponge and string maps hold antiodor and germs, so Findley invented her own with an removable Terry cloth cover you can toss in the washing machine after use. *Mary Miggins Best Home Map*. \$30; gigamon.com

10. Silicone squeegee. To prevent water spots and soap scum buildup, run this silicone blade (made for car windshield) along tile walls and glass doors. *11-inch California DryBlede*. \$30; calwater.com for stores



PHOTOS: 1. JEFFREY M. HARRIS; 2. JEFFREY M. HARRIS; 3. JEFFREY M. HARRIS; 4. JEFFREY M. HARRIS; 5. JEFFREY M. HARRIS; 6. JEFFREY M. HARRIS; 7. JEFFREY M. HARRIS; 8. JEFFREY M. HARRIS; 9. JEFFREY M. HARRIS; 10. JEFFREY M. HARRIS



+ DECORATING

Group mirrors on a rod



Try this twist on the wall collage: Instead of hanging individual pieces directly on the wall, hang them on mass-loom curtains and fasten to wall studs. The system shown here comes as a ready-to-assemble product (Missile Mirror Mirror Collage, \$299; crylics.com/collage.com). But you can achieve a similar effect with a collection of mismatched mirrors of your own. Simply stretch lengths of chain at the top corners of each mirror with equal screws, and use S-hooks to hang the chains from the rod. Then let all that left is to set back and reflect on your new wall art.

—JENNIFER STANLEY



Philosophy Espy System. \$24; homesteaders.com
Black chain. \$1.50 per foot; spiralhardware.com
Single Espy System weight from 5 books in medium; \$100 for 20; amazon.com

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VACUUM PICKS



4 PRODUCTS

Meet the dust, dirt, and allergen busters

Recent innovations have turned vacuum cleaners from simple dust-suckers into powerful tools in the war against dirt, pollen, and allergens. Washable HEPA filters across pollen, bacteria, and mold while cyclonic chambers spin the dirt out of travel through the vacuum, trapping particulate matter. Here, five worth a try. —NATALIA KORMULET

For the Dust Devil: Miele T5T

Key features: An electrostatic dust bag with nine dirt-trapping layers holds up to 5.5 quarts. Remove the bag and a spring-loaded stick switch discharges all but dust and lint inside. A foam protection filter and a HEPA filter keep the second pass clean. Filters to the floor for low clearance. Price: \$550 and up

For Bare-Flaw Floors: Hoover Floormate FH400308

Key features: An oscillation production cleans the dirt in a 22-inch wide-head vacuum head. Also gets up grime and dirt from bare floors with angled plastic brushes. A dual-chamber tank separates dirty water from clean water so it can be reused with Hoover's dirt-fighting mop. A squeegee and hot air blowers work together to dry floors. Price: \$300



For Sensitive Sniffs: iRobot Roomba

Key features: The rubber charging foot focuses the high-efficiency motor to keep the vacuum humming at 40 decibels, about the same volume as a whisper. Roomba should last the entire life. This sleek, friendly vac is made from 50 percent recycled plastic. Its washable HEPA filter should last five years. Price: \$350

For Pet Owners: Dyson DC25

Key features: A virtual roller motor spins the motor head bar to pull dirt and pet hair from carpets. Takeup to 100,000 revolutions a minute, enough to pull dirt and pet hair from deep in the carpet. The motor head bar spins 180 degrees to clean the sides of the carpet. The motor head bar spins 180 degrees to clean the sides of the carpet. Price: \$450

For Germaphobes: Bosch Health Home Vacuum

Key features: The heavy-duty model has nine cyclonic chambers to separate dirt from the air and a washable dust filter. The 5-quart dust container is filled with an electrostatic coating to attract dirt and bacteria and releases it to the dust of a built-in filter and two built-in filters. Price: \$250



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DEADLINE: APRIL 15, 2010

Show off your remodel for a chance to win

In honor of Arbor Day—April 30 this year—here are fast-growing favorites for shade, screening, and spectacular ornamental beauty by LYNN COBBE. Photographs by KAREN FUSCOLO

It's an arboreal conundrum. Most of us want trees that fill out fast, but the same qualities that make a tree gain height quickly often render it a poor as workhorse. Consider the fast-growing arborescens maple, with its grossly surface-scarred and weak wood. Then there's the weeping tree, touted in newspapers and online ads, that grows up to 15 feet a year but spreads to such an extent that in some states it's known as the weeping tree of woe.

Conventional wisdom says that slow-maturing trees live longer and are stronger. So can you grow a tree that'll shoot up without toppling onto your house?

Yes—with some careful vetting. First, refine your notion of fast growing to a growth rate of 16 to 25 feet per year (14 at Warren Robison, longtime superintendent of the UC Davis Arboretum, puts it). “Fast-growing tree is one you can sit in the shade of, five to six years after planting.” Keep in mind that most trees grow faster when young and when planted in soil that supplies optimum moisture and nutrients. Choose well, and you can enjoy your tree in both the short and long term.

We narrowed the experts to find good choices for shade, for screening, or for outstanding ornamental qualities that'll grow in various areas of the country (which your growing zone at the oldhouse.com box set). Read on for a dozen fast-growing trees with saving power.

landscaping





Shade trees

These deciduous trees grow in all but the coldest climates and provide shade for your lawn and garden.

Northern red oak (*Quercus rubra*) Zones 3-8: A broad-crowned shade tree that prefers moist, well-drained soil. Grows in California and Oregon where it helps gray pine resist bark beetle disease. In California, a leafhopper and larger winged, choose yellow oak (Q. lobata) Zones 6-11. It has full sun and moist, well-drained soil. Reaches 60-75 feet high and 4 feet wide.

Freemont maple (*Acer freemontii*) Zones 4-7: A hybrid maple with a broad and upright crown. Grows 75-90 feet high by 40-60 feet wide. Prefers full sun and moist soil with drainage. The young Autumn Color is very bright. It reaches 50-60 feet high with a trunk diameter 40-50 feet wide.

'Green Vase' zelkova (*Elmora americana*) Zones 3-8: Vase-shaped with upright arching branches and rich dark green leaves that turn orange-yellow in fall. Grows 60-75 feet high by 40-50 feet wide. Prefers full sun to partial shade but adapts to a variety of soils. Tolerates wind pollution and drought, making it a shade street tree.

Tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) Zones 3-8: Features a straight trunk and oval leaves. Shining, broad, lobed leaves often enclose saplings when the tree's tulip-shaped flowers, leaves turn yellow in fall. Grows 70-90 feet high by 40-50 feet wide. Prefers full sun and moist, slightly acid soil.



Screening trees

Use these to block second-story views into your yard or block northern winds. Plant them in rows, groups, or alone, depending on their spread.

Downy redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) Zones 8-10: High pyramidal tree with butternut-colored bark, green needles that turn red in autumn. Grows 70-100 feet high by 25 feet wide. Thrives in moist, well-drained, slightly acid soil and full sun.

European black alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) Zones 3-7: The most shaped deciduous tree is useful as an informal screen or windbreak for edging a pond. Grows 40-60 feet high by 20-40 feet wide. Thrives in full sun or part shade in wet soil where other trees might fail.

Eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*) Zones 4-6: Evergreen, soft-blue-green needles. Pyramidal when young. Grows 50-60 feet high by 20-40 feet wide. Thrives in moist, rich soil with drainage and full sun. Tolerates slightly salty soils. The narrower 'Fastigiate' grows 50 feet high by 20 feet wide.

'Green Giant' arborvitae (*Thuja Green Giant*) Zones 3-6: Evergreen with uniform green foliage. Grows 3 feet or more a year. Use as a hedge or as a single specimen that needs no pruning. Grows 50-60 feet high by 30-40 feet wide. Adaptable to poor soil, moist, well-drained soil and full sun.



Ornamental trees

These are the showstoppers of the landscape, whether for their flowers, striking bark, or impressive structure. After the mulberry, apple.

Sargent cherry (*Prunus sargentii*) Zones 8-10: Clouds of pink flowers appear early in spring before leaves appear. Grows 40 feet high with a wide, spreading crown. Small, dark, summer fruit attracts birds. Grows 20-30 feet high and wide, likes full sun and moist, well-drained soil and partial shade.

Heritage river birch (*Betula nigra*) Zones 4-8: This multi-stemmed tree develops an irregular crown. Deciduous butternut green leaves turn yellow in fall. Bark is white to brownish-gray with dark grooves. Grows 40-60 feet high and wide. Prefers moist, acid soil and partial shade.

Sweet bay magnolia (*Magnolia speciosa*) Zones 8-10: Lush, dark green leaves with silvery undersides. Blooms in late March or early April in the South. Leaves scented, mostly white flowers in spring/early summer. Grows 10-20 feet high and wide in the North; to 50 feet high in the South where it's happiest. Needs moist, acid soil and partial shade.

'Natchez' crape myrtle (*Lagerströmia*) Zones 7-9: Well-adapted to dry soil with prolific, scintillating white flowers in late June to September. Distinctive reddish-orange bark is a striking sight. Grows 20-30 feet high by 25-35 feet wide and works well as a hedge. Where it's best is in full sun with rich soil. Japanese crape myrtle (L. 'Soleil') flowers with white flowers is especially vigorous and large. Reaches 40-60 feet high.

Start them off right

Now that you've selected what you want to plant in the ground, here's how to give them a healthy start.

- Plant in early spring or early fall to avoid hot sun.
- Dig a hole just wide and deep as the root ball's diameter and about 2 inches shallower than the root ball's depth. If the soil is compacted or poorly drained, raise the hole.

- The same depth but three to five times wider than the root ball.
- Shake the soil inside to aerate and then own setting supports on the trunk as low as possible to keep the trunk upright.
- Create a berm of loose soil around the outer edge of the

- planting hole to retain and direct water to the root ball.
- Water consistently.
- After planting, watch the sapling's growth around the tree. Keep much away from the trunk to avoid disease problems.



Enlarge a bath with sideways stripes

Dramatically wide, subtly colored bands make a small space grow

BY DEBORAH BAILEY — Photograph by JEAN ALLCOFF



Soft green and yellow glow the walls, making the room look airy.

WARM RELATIONS

Benjamin Moore's Mountain Mist and Soft White are the colors used in this bathroom. The stripes are painted on the walls, and the room is finished with a white ceiling and a white floor.

But the stripes would dwarf a small bath—right? Paradoxically, just the opposite is true: “Wide horizontal stripes appear to ‘push out’ the walls, making the room look larger,” says Debbie Ziauw, a color expert at the Paint Quality Institute. The trick is to layer soft, related shades so that the eye is drawn sideways without being jolted by too much contrast. “Choose two hues that are closely related for an ‘analogous’ scheme,” says Ziauw. Pick one (usually the lighter of the two) for the base color and apply two coats. Then measure the walls’ height in inches and divide by 4. The resulting number will be the width of your stripes. If you end up with an awkward fraction, add a little extra to the top and bottom bands to round off the numbers. Measure stripes, mark them using a pencil and a level, then tape them off. Paint top, middle, and bottom stripes with two coats of the deeper color. Finish the room with a few black accents—such as the mirrors shown above—to give the pale wall colors a sophisticated edge. ■

ADVAIR DISKUS[®] 100/50
(fluticasone propionate 100 mcg and salmeterol 50 mcg inhalation powder)

Did you know
asthma has two
main causes?

Airway
constriction and
inflammation.

ADVAIR
treats both
of them.

Which helps
prevent symptoms
from occurring in
the first place.

ADVAIR

Important Safety Information About ADVAIR DISKUS

- Prescription ADVAIR won't replace fast-acting inhalers for sudden symptoms and should not be taken more than twice a day. ADVAIR is for people who still have symptoms on another asthma controller, or who need two controllers. ADVAIR contains salmeterol. In patients with asthma, medicines like salmeterol may increase the chance of asthma-related death. So ADVAIR is not for people whose asthma is well controlled on another controller medicine.
- Talk to your doctor about the risks and benefits of treating your asthma with ADVAIR. Do not use ADVAIR with long-acting beta₂-agonists for any reason. If you are taking ADVAIR, see your doctor if your asthma does not improve or gets worse. Thrush in the mouth and throat may occur.
- Tell your doctor if you have a heart condition or high blood pressure. Some people may experience increased blood pressure, heart rate, or changes in heart rhythm. ADVAIR is for patients 4 years and older. For patients 4 to 11 years old, ADVAIR 100/50 is for those who have asthma symptoms while on an inhaled corticosteroid.

Please see accompanying Important Safety information about ADVAIR DISKUS on next page.

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.fda.gov/medwatch, or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

Get your first full prescription FREE.*
Go to ADVAIR.com or call 1-800-4ADVAIR.

*Subject to eligibility. Restrictions apply.

ask GlaxoSmithKline

ask you If you don't have a prescription, please call 1-800-4ADVAIR. Visit ADVAIR.com for more information.

What is the most important information I should know about ADVAIR DQ[®]?

- In patients with asthma, long-acting beta₂-agonist (LABA) medications, such as salmeterol (one of the medicines in ADVAIR DQ[®]), may increase the chance of death from asthma problems. It is important to use LABA inhalers only with a controller drug that asthma problems associated with asthma who do not use salmeterol. It is not known whether LABA medicines, such as the other medicines in ADVAIR DQ[®], increase your chance of death from asthma problems when you use them. Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you are taking and the benefits of treating your asthma with ADVAIR DQ[®].
- ADVAIR DQ[®] contains a corticosteroid called dexamethasone. Always have a fast-acting inhaled short-acting beta₂-agonist medicine with you to treat asthma symptoms. If you receive short-acting inhaled corticosteroid medicines, you may need to have your healthcare provider adjust your dose of your fast-acting beta₂-agonist medicine to help you prevent any symptoms you might get worse.
- ADVAIR DQ[®] should be used only if your healthcare provider decides that another asthma controller medicine alone does not control your asthma or that you need 2 asthma controller medicines.
- Call your healthcare provider if breathing problems worsen over time while using ADVAIR DQ[®], how you may need different treatment.
- Call emergency medical care if:
 - breathing problems worsen quickly and
 - you are not responding to inhalers, but it does not seem your breathing problems.

What is ADVAIR DQ[®]?

- ADVAIR DQ[®] contains 2 medicines:
 - **Fluticasone propionate** (the same medicine found in FLUTICORT[®]), an inhaled corticosteroid medicine that reduces swelling in the airways and helps prevent asthma symptoms.
 - **Salmeterol** (the same medicine found in SUNCLEN[®]), a LABA medicine that acts as a bronchodilator or opens up the airways in the lungs, making it easier to breathe. LABA medicines help to relax the airway muscles, so you can breathe more easily. LABA medicines also help to prevent symptoms, such as wheezing and shortness of breath. These symptoms can happen when the muscles around the airway tighten. The action of LABA medicines is temporary, meaning you will only get relief from your breathing and shortness of breath if you use it every day.

Asthma

ADVAIR DQ[®] is used every day to help you prevent symptoms of asthma and to prevent symptoms such as wheezing in adults and children ages 4 and older.

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)

COPD is a chronic lung disease that includes chronic bronchitis (inflammation of the airways) and emphysema (breathlessness). Both can be treated with LABA medicines to help you breathe better. LABA medicines help to relax the airway muscles, so you can breathe more easily. LABA medicines also help to prevent symptoms, such as wheezing and shortness of breath. These symptoms can happen when the muscles around the airway tighten. The action of LABA medicines is temporary, meaning you will only get relief from your breathing and shortness of breath if you use it every day.

What should not use ADVAIR DQ[®]?

- Do not use ADVAIR DQ[®]
 - to treat sudden asthma symptoms or asthma or COPD
 - if you have a severe allergy to milk proteins. Ask your doctor if you are lactose intolerant.

Important information about ADVAIR DQ[®]

The first medicine does not have the power of making your healthcare provider aware of your medical condition or treatment.

What should I tell my healthcare provider before using ADVAIR DQ[®]?

Tell your healthcare provider about all of your health conditions, including if you:

- have heart problems • have high blood pressure
- have diabetes • have thyroid problems
- have asthma • have liver problems
- have osteoporosis
- have an immune system problem
- are pregnant or planning to become pregnant. If you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant, tell your healthcare provider about your asthma and ADVAIR DQ[®].
- are breastfeeding. It is not known if ADVAIR DQ[®] passes into your milk and if it could harm your baby.
- are allergic to any of the ingredients in ADVAIR DQ[®], any other medicines, or food products.
- are exposed to chickenpox or measles.

Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. ADVAIR DQ[®] and certain other medicines may interact with each other. This may cause serious side effects, especially tell your healthcare provider if you take nitroglycerin. The use of LABA medicines, such as salmeterol, may increase the risk of death from asthma. Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you are taking and the benefits of treating your asthma with ADVAIR DQ[®].

How do I use ADVAIR DQ[®]?

Do not use ADVAIR DQ[®] unless your healthcare provider has taught you and you understand everything. Ask your healthcare provider a pharmacist if you have any questions. Children should use ADVAIR DQ[®] with an adult who is instructed by the adult healthcare provider.

Use ADVAIR DQ[®] exactly as prescribed. Do not use ADVAIR DQ[®] more often than prescribed. ADVAIR DQ[®] comes in 3 strengths. Your healthcare provider will prescribe the one that is best for your condition.

The usual dosage of ADVAIR DQ[®] is 1 inhalation twice a day morning and evening. The 2 doses should be about 12 hours apart. Rinse your mouth with water after using ADVAIR DQ[®].

If you take more ADVAIR DQ[®] than your doctor has prescribed, get medical help right away. If you have any unusual symptoms, such as worsening difficulty breathing, shortness of breath, heart rate, or dizziness.

If you miss a dose of ADVAIR DQ[®], but only if you take your dose at the same time each day. Do not take 2 doses at the same time.

Do not take a space dose with ADVAIR DQ[®].

Do not breathe into ADVAIR DQ[®].

While you are using ADVAIR DQ[®] twice a day, do not use other medicines that contain a LABA in any form. Ask your healthcare provider if you are taking any of your other medicines with LABA medicines.

Do not change or stop any of your medicines used to breathe or treat your breathing problems, but tell your healthcare provider if you are taking any of your medicines with LABA medicines.

Rinse your mouth with a fast-acting inhaled short-acting beta₂-agonist medicine if you have any breathing problems while using ADVAIR DQ[®].

Call your healthcare provider or get medical care right away if:

- you develop problems worse with ADVAIR DQ[®].
- you need to use your fast-acting inhaled more often than usual.
- your fast-acting inhaled does not work as well for you as it usually does.
- you get 4 or more inhalations of your fast-acting inhaled for 2 or more days in a row.
- you get 1 whole canister of your fast-acting inhaled in 3 weeks or less.
- you get low oxygen levels when you use the fast-acting inhaled.
- you have asthma and your symptoms do not improve after using ADVAIR DQ[®] regularly for 1 week.

What are the possible side effects with ADVAIR DQ[®]?

- **Low blood sugar.** Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. ADVAIR DQ[®] and certain other medicines may interact with each other. This may cause serious side effects, especially tell your healthcare provider if you take nitroglycerin. The use of LABA medicines, such as salmeterol, may increase the risk of death from asthma. Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you are taking and the benefits of treating your asthma with ADVAIR DQ[®].
- **Increased blood pressure.** Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. ADVAIR DQ[®] and certain other medicines may interact with each other. This may cause serious side effects, especially tell your healthcare provider if you take nitroglycerin. The use of LABA medicines, such as salmeterol, may increase the risk of death from asthma. Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you are taking and the benefits of treating your asthma with ADVAIR DQ[®].
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Oversize bar pulls

When it comes to cabinet hardware, sometimes bigger is better. These handworking handles will add substance and style to your cabinets, drawers, and more.

By GUY LAWRENCE FOR ENR • Photographs by MARK WOODS

The old adage is true: Changing your cabinet hardware is one of the quickest ways to refresh a tired kitchen. And a popular two-pipe these days are extra-long bar pulls, often a plain chrome or nickel bar, with two "legs" that fit into a cabinet or drawer front. These oversize handles make a big statement, of course, but they're also practical: easy to grab, with more to rack up a towel. Luckily there are too many decorative alternatives to this ubiquitous basic bar, and most come in a wide range of lengths, from 5 to 10 inches and more, often with upturned pulls to match. They work well beyond the kitchen, too, easily perking up wardrobes, dressers, vanities, and media centers. One up: If you're looking to put new pulls in old holes, you'll want to make the oversize oversize ones. Here, 21 standard versions also make the bar for style.



Feather look
ANNE HOLLAND
Nickel-plated. Features a hand-curved, tapered pull.
Length: 6 inches
(5 inches center to center)
Try it: Ask your preferred carpenter to install wood cabinets.
\$14.95, www.hollands.com

Exquisite
FOR DRESSERS
\$100 OFF
Details at
Enr.com
or call 1-800-888-8888

perforated pull
BY LAC-HOMERIE
Made of solid brass with a nickel finish.
Length: 7 inches
(5 inches center to center)
Try it: Ask your preferred carpenter to install wood cabinets.
\$14.95, www.hollands.com

Strapped up
BOON MOUNTAIN HARDWARE
Made of recycled perforated aluminum.
Length: 6 inches (5 inches center to center)
Try it: Ask your preferred carpenter to install wood cabinets.
\$14.95, www.boonhardware.com

shopping



curved rectangle

HARDWARE RESOURCES
Made of zinc with a satin nickel finish
Length: 5 1/4 inches
13 1/4 inches center to center
Try it: As a light fixture or on a theme-specific
decorated engine in a bedroom vanity
\$9 lockandkey.com



antique asparagus

MODERN OBJECTS HARDWARE
Made of black powder with brass fittings and
an antiqued finish
Length: 15 1/2 inches (2 inches center to center)
Try it: To add island storage in a country
style kitchen \$40 hardwarex.com



dimpled design

DE VRIES
Made of recycled aluminum in
oil-rubbed bronze
Length: 2 1/4 inches (2 inches center to center)
Try it: In a vintage kitchen, where its pillled
texture and dark finish will complement
vintage materials \$23 shopuprivet.com



bowed bar

RESTORATION HARDWARE
Made of stainless steel with a powder finish
Length: 15 1/2 inches (6 inches center to center)
Try it: In a rustic or French-style kitchen
where its rounded finish and regular profile
will fit right in \$35 restorationhardware.com

squared off

CARLSON CRAFT
Made of Powder Coated magnetic finish
Length: 7 1/2 inches (3 inches center to center)
Length: 8 1/2 inches (3 inches center to center)
Try it: As a shelf, where its hefty bar can
serve double duty as a dish towel holder
\$40 carlsoncraft.com



wooded look

MODERN OBJECTS
Made of Polycarbonate
Length: 6 1/2 inches
(2 1/2 inches center to center)
Try it: To highlight a sign and set of books or
artifacts sitting behind glass cabinet doors
\$25 lockandkey.com



a minimalist bent

WATERS
Made of stainless steel
Length: 5 1/4 inches (3 inches center to center)
Try it: To update a classic white tooth vanity
with simple lines \$24 lockandkey.com



new twisted

MAKE AT HOME
Made of Pewter with a studio finish
Length: 8 1/4 inches (3 inches center to center)
Try it: As a special touch on a family room
media cabinet; its informal finish will
fit a variety of interior styles \$33
lockandkey.com



hanging shelf

A steel pot rack offers double storage
storage for potting supplies. Extra pots sit
on the shelf while tools hang from
\$6 hooks so that they're easy to grab
Sophie's Pot Rack, \$70 potracksgalore.com



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storage tub

Took potting soil where you need it in
this primed wash tub. Its oval shape
easily stores away on a potting table's
lower shelf \$20 restorationhardware.com



get
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metal vase

Shoe supplies or collectible shoes
sit in this public mind metal vase
which pairs copper and white enamel
in our 400 colorful designs \$50 each
chomelab.com (see list on page 10)

Ceramic bath accessories

Ceramic cups and soap in the loo, or repurpose these holders to organize small stuff in an entry, kitchen, or bedroom. By AMY K. HIGGINS Photos by JEFF KESTINE LARSEN



got a clever reuse?

We're excited to see this project in our readers' homes. Submit your ideas to ideas@thefixmag.com for a chance to win \$100.

All home parts have their day. For ceramic bathroom accessories, it was an early 1930s Art Deco. It's when the in toothbrush holders were shaped like seashells, double-decker "duplex" soap niches punctuated shower walls, and recessed toilet-paper holders with elegant crimped edges stylishly disguised tissue. Unlike their all-where predecessors, these accessories came in a rainbow of colors, from matte dinky lavender to glossy jet black.

Thanks to an ample supply of embossed bathroom accessories at salvage parks, it's easy to find period accessories today. And for the amount of charm they can add to your modern-day loo, they're a steal at about \$10 apiece, or even less online. I recently had a powder blue set, including towel bar supports, soap dish, and toilet-paper and tumbler holders, for just \$15.

Most ceramic accessories have lots of mortar on their angled backs and edges where they were adhered to a wall and surrounded by tiles. Some, like the tumbler and toothbrush holder I bought (shown, opposite page), have glossed edges and were surface-mounted, making them easier to move in rooms other than the bath. You can screw them directly to the wall or to a decorative wood plaque to hold keys in an entry, or paper clips and pens in a home office. Or, follow my lead and use them to conceal jewelry in the bedroom. Read on to see how I did it. ■



Each, \$30 each for ceramic tumbler and toothbrush holder plus \$10 for a beveled plaque (see p. 114).

Simple: Takes a steady hand to trim and paint.

Make a wall-mount jewelry holder

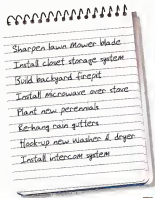
If they can handle tumbler and toothpaste, these vintage bathroom accessories can just as easily conceal my husband's cuff links and my necklaces. Such was the thinking behind this ho- and her- holder. For a decorative touch, I covered the front of the plaque (see below) with a scrap of wallpaper, giving it a more face look. (This is a simple cut of paint.)

- 1 Paint the plaque's edges. Sand the surface smooth, then brush on a coat of interior latex. **Tip:** Instead of buying a quart of paint for a small job like this, get a sample pot for just \$5.
- 2 Apply wallpaper paste. Weight down the corners of the paper to keep it from curling, and carved in a generous layer of paste. I used a premixed, low-odor, clay-based paste.
- 3 Adhere the paper to the board. Press it down with your hands. Then go over the surface with a plastic smoother (\$2 at do-it-best.com) to work out air bubbles.



- 4 Trim paper to fit. Flip the plaque face-down and trace along its edge with a utility knife to remove excess wallpaper.
- 5 Mark locations for holders. Center them on the plaque, leaving enough space in between to easily access and set down items on the lower holder.
- 6 Secure the holders to the plaque. Position them on the marks, and fasten in place using decorative screws. Now use this designated landing spot for all things being to help up the dresser top.

Need help with your to-do list?



Just Ask...

Tune in this month to Ask This Old House and learn how to tackle these projects and many more. For local listings, visit thisoldhouse.com/tv. To ask your question, visit thisoldhouse.com/askquestion.



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The great divider

Consolid-wood DIY gate is a practical upgrade for the well-trained dog—and your home's decor. by KATHY HADGULT • Photography LAURA MOSS

We tend to think of pet gates as unsightly necessities for keeping the critter away from the crown roast or off the leather sofa while we're at work. But they're also key to raising a well-behaved pet. "Gates are a great tool for dog owners to contain their dogs during the housebreaking process," says Lisa Peterson of the American Kennel Club. They also help restrict breeders, protect dogs from household dangers, and wear them away from begging at the table. Most training gates are made of plastic with an authentic puppy-nest above hospital equipment. That's why we've come up with a solid-wood, furniture-grade model you can make in your workshop. Turn the page to learn more on how and why to build it.

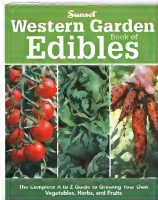


Which adjustable gate keeps dogs from begging at the table.

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Household wisdom: Roger Cook

A great-looking yard can make even the humblest house look grander. This Old House's landscape pro schools us on a few basics. by DEBORAH BROSTIAN • Photographs by MICHAEL LEWIS

Lawns, garden beds, patios—when it comes to outdoor spaces, *This Old House* landscape contractor Roger Cook has planned (or built) it all. But you could say lawns are his, um, special turf. Since first appearing on the television show in 1961, Roger has mowed more than 1 million square feet of grass—about 17 football fields' worth of the stuff. Now that spring has rolled around, we asked him to share his eyes on keeping home exteriors as eye-catching as the rooms inside.

What's a common mistake that homeowners make with their lawns?

Many people overfertilize their turf. Adding more than the lawn needs can cause it to grow 3 to 6 inches per week. It's enough to keep up with mowing at this pace, plus big growth spurs can do the grass and prevent it from establishing deep roots that help it survive during hot, dry weather. Best way to find out how much and what type of fertilizer to apply is to have your soil tested this spring by an extension service. It costs about \$15, and you'll learn exactly what the grass needs for the growing season.

How about mistakes with plants and flowers that are easy to avoid?

In the spring it can be hard to resist buying plants that won't work for your site. You're at the garden center when everything's in bloom and looks beautiful, so you bring home a flowering plant, put it in a shady



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spot, and find that it doesn't grow well because the plant needs sun. Detruncate your sun conditions first, before you buy anything. Do you have full sun? Partial sun? Shade? There are beautiful varieties for all these situations.

Also, many people choose foundation plantings that are too big. Look at bushes built between the 1950s and 1980s—they've got these tall, lanky shrubs that overshadow the house. Dwarf or slow-growing varieties, like 'Purple Gem' rhododendrons and Hesterwell blue spruces, are better choices and require less pruning. Raise them at least 12 inches from your foundation so that the branches won't rub against the house's siding or roof.

Speaking of pruning, any tips you can share for tackling that chore?

Rule 1 of pruning is that there is no single best time of year to do it. It depends on what you're growing. Prune flowering shrubs just when the flowers turn brown, that way you'll cut back more growth but not the buds that hold next year's flowers. So for now, keep your eye on spring bloomers, like forsythia and azalea, and prune when the blooms start to wither. You can cut back evergreen shrubs at any time of year, but I usually do it in February or March, when they're dormant, to allow for a flush of growth when they leaf out for the season. Remember, don't clear off the ends of the plant. You'll get better results by making deep cuts to cut shrub's seed and prevent from the interior to control growth.

Besides a lawn mower, what yard tools do you consider essential?

You need a couple of rakes—a plastic fan rake, 24 to 30 inches wide, for clearing up clippings and debris, and a leaf-blend rake with steel tines, about 12 to 18 inches wide, to spread leaves or mulch. I also recommend a wood-handled half-moon edger, which has a flat, crescent-shaped blade, to cut beds and edge grass along walkways. A whitewash or tarp is handy for moving soil and mulch around. And



Ringer locates the well in a large planter at the Charleston house. filmed in 2000

you need a sprayer to apply fertilizer, one with heavy-duty rubber tires and an adjustable applicator so that you can vary the amount you're putting down.

What's a common yard work question you get these days?

Water conservation is huge, so people want to know how to reduce water use in their yards. There are many ways to do this. First, always water grass and garden beds in the morning so that you lose less to evaporation. If you prep the lawn and beds well—mulching the soil is well-seeded and not compacted—they will more easily water and therefore need less watering. And, of course, you can collect water in rain barrels placed under downspouts. There's even a product called the Rainwater Filter that holds 1,000 gallons of water. It fits underneath a deck and has a pump that moves water to where it's needed.

Patio are a popular spring project. Any advice on building one?

You don't need a huge space—a good rule of thumb is 50 to 100 square feet per person for comfort. Pick a material that fits with your house's aesthetic. If you go for stone, you'll find a better selection at a stone yard versus a home center, and so will the one you visit works with retail customers, not just contractors. Of course, follow codes and best practices for things like safety and proper drainage. But otherwise the design is up to you. The options are limited only by your imagination. ■

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redo

Details make the difference

A color update and period-style touches give a Folk Victorian even more charm

by DEBORAH BROOKMAN • Photo illustration by MICHAEL DRISCOLL



Before



A dormer with stained glass features the existing gables to the left.

"We love our Folk Victorian, but we want to give it more of a period look," says Benjamin Terrill, who lives in this west-facing, 3,600-square-foot home in Wichita, Kansas, with wife Holly and daughter Madeline. So we asked Chicago architect David Russo-Opden what he'd do to increase its appeal.

Born in 1883, with a couple of add-on decks added on later, the house has good proportions, Russo-Opden notes. "The porch feels heavy and disconnected from the style of the house," he says. To remedy this and retain the home's heritage, he suggests swapping sturdy porch columns for slender wood ones with painted bases. Designing the foundation with low shrubs also lightens things up. A white second-floor captain's walk would give the Terrills a spot to enjoy sunset views of the river across from the house, while details like roof spouts, porch-post finials, and a spindle are low-cost ways to add character. A blue-gray color scheme makes the style-appropriate, monochromatic palette feel fresh. "We can implement every one of these ideas. Thank you!" says Benjamin. ■

Finishing touches

A Folk Victorian calls for accents that add detail and texture, but these picks rule other house styles, too.



address plaque
Wood shingles in the front were first mass-produced around the time this house was built. Victorian Woodcraft: \$35



paint
Shades of blue create a soothing scheme. Benjamin Moore, \$32 per gallon



spindle rail
Turned spindles in cedar harmonize with the porch columns. Vintage Doors, from \$12 per foot



shingle siding
These weatherproof built-in boards are Victorian classics. James Hardie: from \$5 per square foot

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Give yourself a tax break

Before you throw up your hands at the cost of homeownership, add up all the ways it pays off on April 15. BY STEPHAN SALZBERG • ILLUSTRATION BY DEAN KELLEY

You already know about deducting mortgage-interest payments and property taxes. But did you also know you could qualify for a \$6,000 credit toward the purchase of a second home—as long as you own one? Or that Uncle Sam will fork over up to \$1,100 to defray the cost of a pellet stove or water heater? With some 100 changes to the tax code last year alone, keeping up with the latest breaks can be harder than controlling your own leaky pump. So we asked CPA Benjie Bassett, a researcher at the Tax Institute at H&R Block, to brief us. Read on for most reasons to love owning the real over your head.

Q Deductions and credits: What's the difference?

A A deduction reduces your taxable income. A credit reduces your taxes, dollar for dollar. A \$100 deduction may decrease your taxes by \$15, while a credit will reduce them by \$100.

Q What's the deal with credits for first-time home buyers?

A If you buy a second home, but skip the first one, you may qualify provided you never use the new one.

Income limits apply, but generally if you have owned and lived in a home for at least five consecutive years over the past eight and bought a new one between November 7, 2009, and April 30, 2010—or have



one under contract and will close before July 1, 2010—you can get back 30 percent of its purchase price, up to \$6,000.

If you're a first-time buyer or haven't owned a home in the past three years, you can get back 30 percent of the purchase price of a new home, up to \$8,000. You can take advantage of this credit on your 2009 or 2010 return.

Keep in mind: You have to include a copy of your closing statement, so you won't be able to file electronically

And if you have within three years, you may have to give the money back.

Q Lots of people now find they are working from home. Can they deduct the cost of a home office?

A As long as your work-related portion is used exclusively and regularly for business purposes. You can't get a deduction if your office doubles as a guest room or you operate your business from the



pro advice

STEVE BOESCH
TAX INSTITUTE AT
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April 15 checklist

Consult your tax accountant or financial adviser. You may deserve a break if, during 2009, you:

- ☒ ...bought a home. You may be able to get back \$8,000.
- ☐ ...paid real estate taxes on a first or second home (including a livable RV). You can take a deduction for real estate taxes in 2009 even if you don't itemize.
- ☐ ...took out a home-equity loan. If you borrowed up to \$100,000—and spent it on anything but a home (or left it not)—you may be able to deduct the interest.
- ☐ ...refinanced to pay for a renovation. If you refinanced with a mortgage of up to \$1 million to make improvements, you may be able to deduct the interest as "home acquisition debt." General. The allowable amount is affected by your home's fair market value.
- ☐ ...made a fire, storm, or other casualty. You may be able to deduct a portion of your unreimbursed losses.
- ☐ ...made certain energy-saving investments. It's not quite cash for crinkles, but almost.

water, wind power, and geothermal heating and cooling. If you can't take full advantage of the credit for your 2009 injury, you can carry some left over to your 2010 return.

Credits for alternative energy are authorized through 2016, so if you haven't made the switch yet, there's still time.

By the way, the solar hot water subsidy applies to your daily hot water needs, not your pool or hot tub.

Q Any breaks for fixing up an old house?

A If buildings certified as historic, you may be able to claim a credit for 20 percent of the renovation costs. Your state historic preservation office should have details. ■

kitchen table. You'll need to do some calculations and document your claims—I suggest photographing

Q Let's say I sell my house for more than I paid (wonderful thinking, I realize). Do I have to pay taxes on the capital gain?

A You can exclude a gain of up to \$500,000, assuming the house was your primary residence during two of the five years preceding the sale. And that amount grows to \$500,000 if you are filing jointly on a married couple. The law was tweaked recently to require the seller to pay some tax on the capital gain if the house was used to generate rental income after 2008. Still, it's a handsome tax break.

Q What about tax credits for home improvements?

A Most apply to energy-saving. And they exist on top of those "cash for clunkers" appliance rebates and energy-related state incentives.

Q Can I get a federal tax credit to help pay an energy-efficient dishwasher?

A Sorry, appliances don't qualify. But there are plenty of tax credit opportunities for energy-saving in your principal residence between January 1, 2009, and December 31, 2010. And you can use these breaks even if you're selling your home soon.

High-efficiency central heating and cooling systems, water heaters, biomass stoves, windows and doors, insulation and heat-reflecting roofs are among the upgrades that qualify. For details, see energy.gov or call the IRS. The credit ranges to 30 percent

of the purchase price of new or more products, maxing out at a total of \$1,000 combined for both years. In the case of central heating and cooling, you can apply the credit to labor costs too. Keep in mind that products must have high Energy Star ratings and are expected to be made longer than five years.

You'll need to keep a certification statement from the manufacturer or installer and fill out all forms 5695 (available at irs.gov). And if you're audited, you'll have to produce receipts and proof of installation, buying an energy-efficient water heater and storing it in the garage doesn't count.

Q What about switching to alternative energy?

A The tax credits here are even more generous: up to 30 percent of the cost, with no cap for big ticket items such as solar electric, solar hot

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4

4. Install the bottom and cap

A. Add the bottom boards. Once all four sides are joined, turn the planter right side up. Apply glue to the top of bottom edges, then drop the bottom boards into place. When all the boards have been added, check that the planter is level at the center and the same at the ends. Use 1/4-inch screws to secure the boards to the edges.

B. Cut PVC for the cap, and glue it down. To make a cap with a 1-inch overhang all around, add 2 inches to the length of the long sides and cut two 1x3s to this length. Apply glue to the face of a 1x3 and the top edge of the long side. Set the 1x3 in place, checking the overhang is even by holding a 1-inch block against the sides of the planter. Repeat with the second 1x3. Measure the distance between the long cap pieces and cut two short cap pieces to size. Glue them down in the same manner as the long pieces.

C. Finish installing the cap. Drill pilot holes at the middle and ends of each cap piece. Drive 1/4-inch screws into the holes.

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5. Sand and paint

A. Fill faster holes. Fill faster holes with spackling paste until the paste is about 1/2 inch above the surrounding surface. Let dry before sanding.

B. Sand the surface. Using the grit sandpaper, sand the exterior surfaces, and wipe them down with a tack cloth to remove dust. Apply two coats of exterior paint. Let paint dry for at least seven days before filling the planter. ■



A

5

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Make a mudroom that works for you

7 versatile drop-spots for coats, bags, and shoes, each packed with space-saving and clutter-busting ideas to help tidy up your entry

BY STAN WILLIAMS
PRODUCED BY COLETTE SCARLON

Prized for organizing all manner of gear, from backpacks to tennis rackets, mudrooms also double as spaces for chores as diverse as doing laundry and getting plants. What's more, they act as an intermediary between the dirt and germs that come outside the house and the freshly swept and dusted surfaces inside. • To get the most out of your mudroom—whether you're adding a new one or reworking the one you already have—carefully consider how you'll use it and how much square footage you can realistically allocate for it. If you just need to stow a few coats and a shopping bag, a tidy row of hooks behind the entry door will suffice. For families with kids, more spacious digs dedicated out with shelves for storing school supplies and sports equipment off to the side or back door may be in order. • The finishing materials you choose and extras you add also play a role in how the mudroom looks and functions over the long haul. Highly trafficked floors, for instance, should be easy to sweep and able to take beating. And making, whether built-in or freestanding, should be used for all members of the house, ensuring comfortable shoe changing for adults and children. • Follow along for mudroom options to suit various floor plans, plus smart ideas and features to help you maximize your drop-spot.

well-ordered main entry

This mudroom off the back door serves as the home's primary entrance for family of four. A built-in with graceful arches and curves makes the mudroom tough for guests to live.

• **Full coat cubbies.** A 10-foot-long by 10-inch-deep storage unit tucked into open "lockers" hooks aside keep coats out of direct view—and out of the thoroughfare. High up shelves store occasional-use items, while ones down low keep everyday stuff within a easy reach. A built-in bench provides a neighbor shoe changes.

• **Rugged runner.** A built-in rug protects the painted wood floors and makes it easy to shake a clean outside.

• **Screen door.** This classic bug blocker also provides essential ventilation and sunlight to reduce humidity and prevent mildew—and helps dry out wet gear.

• **Over-the-door basket.** A movable storage bin holds lemons, soaps, and winter hats that are too unwieldy for cubbies.



PHOTO: JACQUES-LOUIS VITTORE/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

storage-packed stair landing

Shoehorned in an 8-foot-wide-by-3 1/4-foot-deep stall landing off basement-level back door, this space challenged designers' cleverly curbed coats in an unexpected place.

Recessed built-in. An open, 20-inch-deep "cove" is carved out of the stair wall leading to the kitchen/living space. The bottom shelf, which overhangs the built-in by 2 inches, doubles as a seat and a stop for grocery bags. The upper shelf shows hints—plus hints the homeowners wish to keep out of reach of their small children.

- **Spallboard paneling.** Woodchuck-style finished with easy-to-clean semigloss enamel safeguards the inside of the built-in and surrounding walls from dents and dings.
- **Woven bins.** These natural fiber baskets with easy-to-grip handles slide out from floor-level cubbies for storing shoes and out accessories.

- Skate like floor**. Rather than continuing with the same wood used for the stairs, the landing a/floor is tiled for easier cleanup and protection against rusty boots

Create a function-filled mudroom for less

Every well-thought-out mudroom has five essential features. Here, one family worked the details to effectively and elegantly bring coats & shoes to heel so they and school supplies stay back doors out of their kitchen.

DI-STOREAGE There's no easier—or faster—way to add much-needed storage space than with a wall-mounted unit like this one made from metal standards, adjustable bins, bins, and shelves fastened to a slotted wall of bleachers (you can substitute a ready-made shelf). **Quest** knows about \$120 for a similar DIY set; more stock parts from the home center.

2x WALLS To guard against wear, sheetrock drywall is used, painted with a heavy-duty semigloss. Mimic the rustic look of the horizontal treatment by staining tongue-and-groove floor planks. Paint grade white pine. \$1.36 per square foot. lumberliquidators.com.

3-SEATING Make your own shoe-changing bench by joining two shelves or lengths of reclaimed wood, such as these *Members*, one beside the other on both brackets. Two 12 by 46-inch boards were chosen that hold up to 200 pounds each. \$200 total. *Donna and Tom*

4-4023808ES Rubber take-it-hole line designed for grabs and log lines. The shoes and log-laded containers on upper shanks can keep art supplies dust free. Take, \$16 each, shops.ebay.com. Multitasker of choice contractors, 800-333-0066 and www.

5x-FLOORING Protect wood floors with a rug that'll also warm up your feet. The busy design of this wool rug, Model #A3 by-tyl-tyl-tyl, is made to show, 2222 perovskite. If you have old new flooring, consider vinyl. All Organic Vinyl Collection tiles are made with recycled materials and produce with a low VOC adhesive. If you are not satisfied, archsystems.com

multipurpose pantry

Creating up before coming in for dinner—or shopping a trade—is only at the house, where the back door opens into a combined mudroom and bathroom.

- **Hand-washing station.** In addition to a full goose-neck style of sink, it has a drink ng fountain so that kids can rehydrate without tracking outside dirt into the house.

> Stainless-steel counter: This stainless-steel counter, resembling barbed wire, is also done after making many art projects.

Open shelving: An easy access alternative to closed shelving, shelves along the back wall and below the counter hold baskets loaded with snacks and other treats.

Message board—Glue in place coordinating transforms that sliding door into a family communications center: holding phone numbers, grocery lists, and kids' drawings.

• **Wider neck floor.** Decked with mesh and grouted in place. Turned back over the lip so as to
 • **mosaic tile but lend more slip resistance.**

the seat provides a comfy spot to remove shoes and kneel while jotting a quick note at the causer. Storage underneath gets shoes off the floor for sweeping and kicking up



open and airy enclosed porch

A summer cottage is sleeping porch/mulch area as a catchall for sandy flip-flops and damp towels. Folding chairs offer comfy spots to pat on towels or pick a tale before heading outside.

- **Fresh-feeding cupboard.** Providing as much storage as a priority built-in, it will keep furniture, pet-friendly household toys and toys for the beach or the shore off dirty dog paws.
- **Drying rack.** Towels or wet clothes hang to dry on this vintage wall-mount rack. Find similar ones for about \$25 at antique cons.
- **Roof trap.** A personalized steel container recycles rain and keeps water from pooling on the floor beneath the eaves.
- **Window-crank hooks.** Rather than mount a peg rack, the homeowners use cement anchors to hang baseball caps and bags for bicycles.

Make a wall-hung first-aid kit out of a vintage lunch box and use an elf for an M&M as \$10

Fluted wood floor with wall-resistant porch panel about \$100 per piece

triple-duty laundry area

A half wall between the kitchen and back door portions of this 6-by-12-foot central laundry room, potting area, and mudroom. The homeowners camped off-sailed garden tags and too them in the window on the way into the house.

- **Granite counter.** A surface for hanging clothes and potting plants, granite is easy to wipe clean without the soil-catching grooves associated with tile tops.
- **Slate floor.** This indoor/outdoor panel is liquid-resistant and won't stain. Unlike polished stone tiles, which can get slick, slate is textured and its surface provides traction.
- **Fluted wood bench.** A thrift store find provides clattering bedding and a drop-off point for wet gardening supplies—and laundry detergent.
- **Plant ledge.** The half wall is capped with a polyurethane wood shelf. Petals bloom on top get plenty of light and help sun-dry views of the utility area from the kitchen.



Keep clothes hanging handy by installing a \$3 dowel between the wall and the washer



False wallcovering by putting with laminate, waterproof, half-way up the wall \$10 per piece

kid- and pet-friendly back-door entry

Located at the rear entrance, this mudroom provides a place for kids to shed dirty pants after heading from the car to the house, as well as an out-of-the-way feeding seat for the family dog.

- **Mudak tile floor.** A quick pass with a mop removes muddy paw prints from these black and white ceramic hexagons.
- **Wall hooks.** Mounted at a child-accessible level, hooks recapture little ones' fishing pencils and bags instead of tossing them on the floor.
- **Hill rack.** Hung between the back door and the entry is a saffron mesh this vintage mirrored rack gives adults a place to hang keys before heading out for the day.
- **Wood bench.** Turned up under the ceiling is a 10-piece wooden storage bench under which for hiding ball and Frisbee.



Hassle-Free Steps to a Healthier Home

Our room-by-room guide will have you breathing easier in no time

Life is risky. But while you can't avoid every hazard that enters your path, you can try to remove a whole lot more for yourself and your family—pets included. It starts by blocking common routes at the front door, including pollen, pesticides, outdoor solvents, and disease-carrying critters. Indoors, you want to prevent mold, bacteria, and viruses from taking hold, and minimize allergy-provoking animal dander and dust mites. Making your home healthier can involve simple remedies, such as opening a window to let in a blast of fresh air, and more lasting solutions, like moving away from paints, fumigations, and cleaning products that throw off chemical vapors.

To get the lowdown on the best actions for you to take right now—and some to consider down the road—we consulted health and environmental experts across the country. Here, our best advice for cleaning up your household

by
Deborah
Baldwin

Photographs by
Matthew
Benson



Entryways RIGHT NOW

- 1 Keep pollen out.** During hay fever season, shake or brush off outdoor air and keep a brush and vest nearby to bring pets, car and feet. Don't hang laundry or outdoor clotheslines, at least for now.
- 2 Add mats on both sides of the door.** Up to 80 percent of the dirt that gets tracked inside—along with outdoor allergens, bacteria, and lawn chemicals—can be caught with a double length of washable matting before it makes it all at home. Showhere. Waterhog mats, which can be heated down (from \$40, showhere.com).
- 3 Air out dry cleaning.** Take off plastic bags before you come inside so that any residual perchloroethylene, a common dry cleaning solvent and suspected carcinogen, can evaporate. If your dry cleaner has a strong chemical odor when you pick it up, give it back and ask that it be properly dried. Or Google "organic dry cleaning" to find a pet- and baby-safe service near you.

MAYBE LATER

- 4 Establish a no-shoes indoors policy.** Keep a basket of slippers at the door for family and guests alike.
- 5 Install vent fans in small spaces.** Keeping humidity levels in these areas below 50 percent prevents condensation and the spread of musty odors and mold and mildew, which can trigger allergies and asthma. Find fan models that work for crawl-space ventilation at garnlund.com.
- 6 Create a pet checkpoint.** Treat cats and dogs with a monthly bath and flea medication, and use a flea comb on them \$4, petco.com. Create flea barriers they can't cross. Flea sprays and collars contain products, which can rub off on kids and furnishings.



leakage inhibits bacterial growth. All collect less dust than carpeting does. Showtime: *Marbleum Click*. Inexpensive tiles (\$7–\$9 per square foot; Sofitflooring.com).

42 **Look for chemical-free furnishings.** Mildew's hiding made from natural fibers, and painted wood furniture and cabinets made with water or oil-based paint.

43 **Avoid fireproofing and walling with toxic resistant coatings** that contain perfluorinated chemicals. Questions have been raised about their safety.

Laundry/Pet area

RIGHT NOW:

44 **Descent kids into stinked containers** to keep them from being Sirens to show here: 2) cup Mail us: [hot water. Take it to a commercial laundry if your machine can't handle the bulk.

47 **Make sure your clothes dryer vents outdoors** so that moisture won't build up indoors and encourage mildew.

48 **Wash sheets, duvet covers and bedspreads once a week in hot water** to keep odors and dust mites under control.

49 **Wash your hands after feeding the machine, especially when you do it in the house** a sock, so that you don't catch \(and spread\) germs.](http://Canister (36 rubbermaid.com)</p>
<p>45 Opt for paper- or plant-based kitty litter. Litter that contains dust or smelly salts may be harmful to pets and people who inhaled.</p>
<p>46 Wipe floors naturally. Launder your pet's bedding regularly in</p>
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MAYBE LATER:

50 **Upgrade to a steam washer.** Look for an MBF certified model able to zap germs and allergens with high-temperature steam heat.

Bedrooms

RIGHT NOW:

51 **Let your bed air out before you make it each day.** This will allow mildew and moisture to evaporate. Airing out your pillows and vacuuming the mattress will help control mites, too.

52 **Screen out pollen.** If you have a window air conditioner, use the fan and air filter (change it with the filter often). Keep windows closed.

53 **Sleep using moth balls, period.** They contain possible carcinogens. Store clean clothes and linens in zip-up bags. Buy cedar chips from a pet store and make your own sachets by wrapping them in cheesecloth, toss or refill when they lose their scent.

54 **Avoid placing office equipment in the bedroom.** Copiers and printers can generate toxic airants.

MAYBE LATER:

55 **Put in a whole-house fan.** Installed in the attic or under the roof, these both cooling systems draw poor-quality air out and fresh air in (a heat exchanger is not going to be too).

56 **Do dust-proof covers on pillows and dust covers to keep mites out.**

57 **Snap out wall-to-wall carpet** for hardwood and laminate and rugs. Strips that will help reduce the buildup of dust, pet dander and other allergens.

58 **Replace your mattress with one free of flame retardants.** Some mattresses incorporate wool, which is naturally flame resistant.

59 **Set up a humidity monitor.** Aim for a humidity level of 40 to 50 percent; a higher level can trigger the growth of mold and mites. If levels fall below 20 percent, consider a plug-in humidifier—and follow the manufacturer's care tips. Show here: *Everest* or *HealthCheck Monitor* (\$13; alivestore.com).

Basement

RIGHT NOW:

60 **Check for radon.** This odorless natural gas is the second leading cause of lung cancer after smoking. Use a test kit, like *RTCA's 4-Phase Charcoal Canister Test* (\$23; rtca.com). Measure levels every few years and after any basement work.

61 **Schedule an HVAC checkup** to make sure furnaces, boilers and water heaters are properly

venting carbon monoxide.

62 **Clear or replace your furnace or forced-air system filter** every three months. Electrostatically charged pleated filters do a particularly good job of removing allergens. For more on these filters, see page 96. Show here: *Accumulair Diamond* (\$10; kies.com).

63 **If you own a sump pump,** make sure it's working properly to that mold-inducing moisture won't build up.

64 **Check for leaking asbestos** around pipes and boilers. Call an expert if you suspect it's present.

65 **Avoid air fresheners,** which may mask odors with fragrance-bearing phthalates and may contain VOCs as well.

MAYBE LATER:

66 **Install a dehumidifier** to keep humidity below mold-triggering levels.

67 **If you're remodeling and finishing walls,** choose lime plaster over drywall if you want to match plaster walls in the rest of your house. It's naturally mold-resistant. Or at least go for paperless drywall, such as *Georgia-Pacific's Dens-Green*, which is less vulnerable to moisture than the paper-backed variety.



Garage/Workshop

RIGHT NOW:

68 **Take inventory.** Safely dispose of half-empty containers of old oil, paint, stain and solvents (consult your local sanitation department for guidelines). Store gas in an up-spill canister. Keep all toxic products far away from water heaters that have pilot lights. If possible, lock up volatile chemicals, pesticides and herbicides in a separate locked-proofed.

69 **Set up to work outside,** and wear a mask around. Opt for plenty of ventilation when cutting chemically treated lumber and formaldehyde-packed MDF. Give wood dust in a proven health hazard.

MAYBE LATER:

70 **Switch to organic lawn care.** Lawn chemicals may grow up the grass first, but they ultimately weaken its defenses against drought and disease. Runoff is a major source of pollution rivers and lakes—which helps explain how microbes and weed killers can end up in your drinking water. Find a natural lawn care starter kit on page 22.

71 **Upgrade your workshop's dust collection system.** A HEPA filter trap and that scores right into the ports of power saws and Sanders greatly reduces airborne dust.

72 **Swap gas-powered tools for gear for quieter.** Run free electric and manual options. Pick up a new lithium-ion motor (\$250; lowers.com) has a battery life that lasts a full minute with 1000 rpm. The bottom line: You can have a well kept home and take care of your health too. ■



41

they play on the floor.

39 **Test suspect paint surfaces for lead.** This known neurotoxin can be released into the air when paint chips or peels, and a present in paint made before 1990. Newer more reliable test kits, such as the *LeadCheck Household* and *Test Kit*, can evaluate paint light and dark colors (\$19 for eight tests; leadcheck.com). If you suspect lots of having lead paint, check the list of leads at leadcheck.com.

40 **Sealize darkrooms and toys,** which can harbor germs for 48 hours. Sealize items covered in treated with a bleach germicide, such as *Venex's Chlorine UV-C Sanitizing Wand* (\$90; venex.com).

MAYBE LATER:

41 **Light-colored, dark tile, wood or stone in place of carpets and vinyl flooring.** Unless vinyl's three natural materials can't attract pet hair and

59





We just fell for the ramshackle little house

You could see daylight through the brick walls, the ceiling was crumbling, and the place had never been wired for electricity. But one couple could see the 1850s cottage's potential.

The house wasn't much to look at as it lay. Abandoned for 20 years after a fire, the windows and doors were missing, charred, or boarded up. There were no floors downstairs, and the water-damaged plaster was crumbling. Squawks ran in and out, and birds nested in the first-floor tub. Yet there was a certain charm to the place. The old brick, dating from the 1850s, had wonderful color; the window frames were solid granite, and the upstairs had lovely pine floors. With just four rooms, it seemed like it could be a cozy home for the two of us. Eventually

My husband, Walt, and I first laid eyes on the Powhatan, Virginia, cottage while visiting our son Greg and daughter-in-law Marion, who live in town nearby. They had bought the adjacent, larger house as a vacation getaway—and potential retirement spot for Walt and me. In doing so, they'd also taken on this little four-upper that sat on the half-acre property—known as a “kitchen house,” it once served as the summer kitchen and servants’ quarters.

Well, the kids were right. A new home was just the kind of change—and challenge—Walt and I had been looking for. But while they told us to consider both houses ours, we decided to take on the smaller house exclusively, with its four original fireplaces, and beautiful original upstairs. With Walt's background as a master plumber and all-around handyman, plus my passion for design, we figured we could make it work.

So in May 2006, we moved into the main house, an 18-acre estate that was in good condition, and started work on the little one. It'll admit, it wasn't an easy decision. I could that



BEFORE: The kids were so good about helping that homeowners had to do a lot of work on their own. **AFTER:** The newly refurbished but ramshackle fireplace is the new focal point. Artsy painted glass plates fill the gaps between the newly repapered living books and complement the new post-Peter

By Roberta Purcell **homeowner** Photographs by Patricia Lyons Styling by Sarah Horst



ABOVE: Custom Shaker-style cabinets fill the nooks and crannies of the kitchen while under-cabinet lights draw attention to the marble backsplash.

five eight and asked Walt if we were doing the right thing, leaving our friends and our country home in Pennsylvania's Pocono mountains to take on this runaway trade house in a slowly revitalizing urban area.

But by the next morning, that moment of doubt had passed, and I was merely jockeying our paint colors for what I was sure would be a three-month project.

Of course, four months on, it was still just a shell with no utilities.

See, the house had only rudimentary plumbing and no electricity when we took it on. And to ensure that we were separated the two houses in the future, the city said we needed to run gas, plumbing, and other utility lines from the main house to the cottage we'd decided to make our new home. And it was up to Walt, ever the perfectionist, to figure out the best way to cut the lines—our intention here to bring power to the place.

By then, at least, the shell finally looked like it would withstand a mild wind. When we first really inspected the place, I had trouble believing the brick mason who said it wouldn't fall down. I mean, you could see daylight through the brickwork. Apparently, it just needed repointing.



BEFORE: Crumbling water-damaged plaster covered much of the brick in the kitchen. **AFTER:** The repointed masonry now offers an air-tight barrier. **BEFORE:** The kitchen's plaster had crumbled away from the brick in the walls.

We had also dug a 2-foot-deep trench right down to the house's footings—on the Southern summer heat, and you—so a gravel-filled trench down to prevent further water damage to the foundation. Working our way in, Walt spent a month mending the warped walls and loose beams.

For the windows, we contacted a well-known local craftsman. He made replacements for our four most damaged frames and sashes, but refused to do any more, saying we could repair the rest. So Walt carefully applied damaged pieces and the 160-year-old windows worked like new.

As winter came, we went down a lot more work roads, though it wasn't as hot as we had hoped. With no insulation, no matter how much wood we burned it was still cold and damp. And we were constantly filthy. We had to ready gut



What we did

Redid a 900-square-foot 1850s cottage

Remodeling cost: \$65,000

Time frame: 18 months

Where we lived:

Repointing the brick fireplace ourselves and salvaging what materials we could.

Where we stayed: On the

lot between a septic tank and custom cabinetry but considering how much time we spent in there, it's worth it.

What we would do differently: May be invest in something a little more durable than pine floors. They're all scratched up

from our dog, but I guess you can call it character. **Biggest challenge:** Running utilities like plumbing from the main house. **How we solved it:** By being patient and taking our time to plan it all out on paper before making any moves.



DURING: Homeowner Walt Purcell showed off the tight safety precautions during dirty demo work. **AFTER:** With fresh drywall, new pine floors, and a new fireplace mantel surrounding the gas stove, the living room is one of the house's standout spaces.





LEFT: The homeowners stripped off the layers of paint to refinish this front door, revealing the built-in lockers.

MIDDLE: The home's partially built shelves got a new look with black paint and a gold steel design.

RIGHT: The front porch on the bed room's original wooden beams got the recent look of the old brick surround.



Homeowner tip

ROBERT A. PURCELL, PETERSBURG, VA

"When you have a small space, every centimeter counts. So sit down and talk to your HVAC pro about ductwork design options that won't bump out in odd places."

the house, filling a dumpster as long as the building with crumbled plaster and rotting wood. Thankfully, our two sons wanted to get their hands dirty alongside us.

We took pride in learning new skills. The four wood-burning fireplaces had been bricked over for coal stoves. It would have cost us \$700 per fireplace to have a mason to undo that work, so Wali learned to do it himself—and used some of the money saved to buy himself a new bicycle.

Once spring arrived, I asked Wali to build me a moop so I could start landscaping around it. He thought it was a distraction from the more important interior work that remained, but I needed a project that would lead us out. Not that it was easy. For years, people had been chalking boards at the empty house, and the soil was matted with glass. But with lots of digging and some new soil, I finally got my garden growing.

Soon after, we got to the insulation and drywall stage, and things really started to take shape. With only four rooms, we knew we didn't have an inch to waste as members, so we consulted with an architect.

In the kitchen, we were originally going to go with stock cabinets and just use fillers to fit them into the awkward space. But a local appliance store referred us to great custom cabinetmakers who could make Shaker-style built-in cabinetry to fit our vision. They also built our built-in vanity and two tall storage cabinets.

For over a year and a half, our life and conversations had revolved around the house, and it was almost sad to finish. But Petersburg is filled with people tackling similarly unprofitable projects, so we organized the Good Grief, What Were We Thinking, Restoration and Rehabilitation Potluck Dinner. It was great fun to just sit around and talk with others about their sub-plans and challenges.

Just a few small projects remain. We're patching the wallows and repainting most of the exterior walls. With more free time, we're volunteering around the community, which has many income houses like ours in need of some TLC. This house may one day be a typical someone's place, but it turned out to be the perfect one for us. ■

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Reading Room: A reader who's been a fan of the show for years, Robert A. Purcell, a local resident, was inspired to build a house like the one he saw on the show. He's now a member of the show's fan club.

ALL ABOUT

Exterior stain

These coatings show off wood to its best advantage while protecting it from the elements. This Old House decodes the differences between the various types of stain so that you can get the look you want. **By Thomas Baker**

Spring heralds the arrival of weather warm enough for us to finally get outside and start undoing the damage winter has wrought on woodwork. Refreshing the finish on decks, fences, and other top-to-the-do list because without renewed protection against Mother Nature, wood will start to decay. In a one-two punch, sunlight breaks down the lignin that holds wood fibers together, leaving a gray surface that can't hold a finish. Then winter gets in, rotting boards and shingles and, worse, potentially compromising the structures that lie beneath them.

You can safeguard wood in one of two ways: either with paint, which seals it under an opaque film, or, perhaps better, with exterior stain. The beauty of stain is that it's easy to apply, resistant to peeling, and brings out wood's natural grain. But stain comes in a bewildering number of types. Some are as clear as bourbon, others are as milky as paint. Some form a film on top of the wood; others leave behind nothing but a hint of surface color.

Rather than waste time—or money—with trial and error in pursuit of the right stain for your job, take a look at the following pages. We translate the confusing labels, show you some of the many places stains are used, and offer tips on how to apply and maintain a finish for maximum durability. Once you make your choice and lay it on, you can rest easy, knowing that your wood is taken care of. Well, at least until next spring.

What's in a stain?

These are the ingredients found in all basic semitransparent, the most widely used stain type.



pigments
Add color to wood and give it stain the sun's ultraviolet rays.

additives
Improve finish performance and make the stain easier to apply.

solvents
Thin the oils and resins so that they can fully penetrate the wood.

resins and oils
Carry the pigments and add to the wood fibers and shield them from water.



Afterward, deck like it's with great care—in the sun, clear of debris, protected with a burgundy tinted penetrating stain. Green Safe Premium Semi-Transparent Waterproofer by Drexel Heritage, here now.

VITALS

Oil- or water-based? Oil- or water-based?

Water-based acrylics stand up best to the sun. Oil stains penetrate deeply even in tropical environments. New hybrid blends do both and arrived in 2000s.

What do they cost?

Expect to pay \$35 to \$48 per gallon. Marbled "green" stains typically run from \$10 to \$35.

How long will the finish last?

It depends on the type. Those with more pigment last the longest—up to 7 years for solid color stain. Clear finishes, which have the least amount of pigment, need to be reapplied annually.



When to apply it?

Before installation. Ideally, or soon after to limit exposure to the elements. Reapply as needed, preferably in the spring.

DIY or hire-a-pro?

Most homeowners can easily apply stains using a brush or pump sprayer. For big projects that need lots of prep, consider hiring a pro.

THE FOUR MAJOR TYPES

Semibolid

Has less pigment than a solid-color stain, so it only partially obscures the wood's grain. Leaves no surface film (can't peel). Recoat every 2 to 4 years.

Clear toner
Finely ground iron pigments called iron oxides block the sun without obscuring the wood's grain and impart a warm tone. Leaves no surface film (can't peel). Recoat annually.

Solid color

Looks like a flat paint. Masks the wood's grain but not its texture. Forms a film that can peel if not properly applied. Recoat every 3 to 5 years.

Semitransparent

Contains enough pigment to change the wood's color but not enough to obscure its grain. Leaves no surface film, can't peel. Recoat every 2 to 3 years.

Basic wood

Designed to turn gray and rot unless you cover it with stain.

Shows color differences: semibolid and semitransparent vs. clear toner/ Solid Color Stain

Which stain is right for you?

Before you buy, ask yourself these questions

What's the wood coated with now? If it's bare, choose whatever stain you want. But if it has a film finish, it's easiest to stick with that: penetrating stains can't go over a film. Also, water-based stains will cover oil-based ones, but not the other way around.

What kind of wood do you have? Soft woods, like pine and cedar, easily accept any penetrating stain. But only certain kinds of hard woods, such as teak or ipe, will soak up ultra-dense hardwoods like oak and mahogany. Always test these woods first to make sure the finish will penetrate and dry.

How warm is it? For deck decks, unless you can send off the top layer you'll get the best protection from a penetrating finish or clear toner, a semitransparent, or a semibolid. Solid-color stains are best on new wood.

How much gray do you want to see? The less pigment a stain has, the more gray you'll see, as shown on the stack of blocks at left. But the more pigment, the longer you can go before recoating.

Where is it located? Stain on horizontal or south-facing surfaces gets more punishing UV rays than on vertical surfaces or shady north sides. To minimize maintenance, consider stains with more pigment.

Where to use them

Apply stains to any exterior wood that you want to keep looking and performing its best

4. Decking Even on a wooden deck, stains and sealers can benefit from a stain or sealer. Sealing the finish makes it easier to coat hard-to-reach surfaces. [Krylon Seal Transparent Wood Stain krylon.com](http://krylon.com)



sidings Most any stain made for decking can be used on siding. Plus, it's a lot longer than the same finish on a deck because vertical surfaces take less of a beating. On vinyl siding, a clear or light-colored stain is best. bejco.com



7. Decks Semitransparent stains emphasize a fence's design while clear toners show off its wood grain. Apply either type with a pump sprayer. The ideal for coating railing rails and narrow nooks and crannies is a fence. [Wagner QuickStain Spray Transparent or Clearstain Brown](http://wagner.com) similar to clearstain wagner.com



Waterproofers

These penetrating liquids seal the wood so that it won't shrink, crack, or rot. But they contain little or no pigment that prevents surface graying. One type, which typically contains wax or silicone, makes water bead up on the surface, so that water to spread out and soak. "Blockers" degrade quickly, usually in a matter of months, so you know it's time for a fresh coat when the beading stops. "Blockers" can last a few years. Water drains faster on a clear sealer and doesn't leave behind spots like a blocker does, but there's no ill-effects sign that it's time for a new coat.

PHOTO: JACQUES/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM; STYLING: JACQUES/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM; PHOTO: JACQUES/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM; PHOTO: JACQUES/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

ALL ABOUT Exterior stain

Troubleshooting

• Bleeding. Stir a quart of laundry bleach in a gallon of water mixed with a cup of TSP substitute. (Just full strength, bleach neutralizes the wood.) Brush into the deck surface, and rinse before the solution has a chance to dry.



• Peeling. This occurs only in finishes that form a film, such as solid-color stains, penetrating stains don't peel. There are many causes of peeling—poor prep work, wood decay from rot or sun, water vapor getting underneath the film and lifting it, UV damage to the finish itself—but the only cure is to remove the peeling stain and start over on a sound, clean surface.

• Fading. It's the inevitable effect of the sun and foot traffic, but it's also a good indicator that it's time for a new coat of penetrating stain or sealer. To find out, test the wood by pouring some water on a shady spot of your deck and seeing how long it takes to soak in. If the water disappears in less than five minutes, the wood is ready for a new coat. If a finish seems to be fading too quickly, use a stain with more pigment.

stain it yourself

The Different color stain from the composite decking and stain a wood deck in about 15 minutes.



Maintaining stain

As with any coating, longevity depends on good preparation and application. Professional painter Rich O'Neil offers his advice for putting penetrating stains on decks and siding.

- 1. Don't delay:** If you see a spot of bare wood or notice fading, get right to work. If you wait too long, you'll have to sand out the gray discoloration before you start.
- 2. Clean:** Wet the wood with a hose, then apply a cleaner like Jomax. Let it sit a few minutes, then scrub with a stiff brush (look over the deck). Hose off the debris; don't use a pressure washer, which can gouge wood. Pull out any junk between boards with a 5-in-1 tool. On vertical surfaces, wash from the bottom up.
- 3. Sand:** When the wood is dry, rough up the surface with an orbital sander or pole sander fitted with 60-grit paper. Use a leaf blower to blast off the dust.
- 4. Apply:** O'Neil favors a thick 4- to 6-inch black stain brush, like the one above, which gives him better control than a sprayer. To prevent lap marks, work on only two or three boards at a time and go from one end to the other. If spraying or rolling on the finish, always go back and brush the surface.
- 5. Wipe:** After 20 minutes, wipe up any stain that hasn't penetrated. To avoid spontaneous combustion, put stain-soaked rags in a sealed can filled with water. Dispose of the canister at a hazardous-waste center.



pro advice

RICH O'NEIL, MASTERWORK PAINTING & RESTORATION, BOSTON, MASS.
"I learned this is on the hard way. Before you start staining an elevated deck, cover everything underneath with plastic sheets to guard against drips."

Eco-safe stains

These finishes are friendly to the environment—and your lungs

Stains are packed with solvents to ensure that their resins and pigments penetrate wood fibers. Problem is, the solvents in most oil-based stains contain VOCs, which pollute the air and are unhealthy to breathe. Many so-called "green" stains—those containing less than 200 grams of VOCs per liter—only on waterborne resins and pigments that behave differently than traditional ones. Here's what to expect.

• Faster dry time. Waterborne stains dry faster than oils so you can get out on your deck sooner. But greater care is required during application to prevent lap marks; brush the finish on no more than two boards at a time, and be sure to cover their lengths in one pass. Also, stains should be applied in the shade when surface temperatures are above 50 degrees.

• Easier to soak in. The new formulas are more durable and abrasion resistant, but don't penetrate as deeply or quickly as oil, so it's easy to oversimplify them and leave them spotty. To avoid this, brush out the finish to a film even film. Wipe off any excess immediately.

• Potentially prone to mildew. Non-toxic stains may not contain chemicals that prevent mildew. If the fungi are a problem where you live, you'll have to add mildewcide to the stain before application.



Staining composite boards

The wood particles in wood-grain plastic composite decking are just as vulnerable to the sun as solid wood and will fade in days or weeks. Specialized semitransparent stains for composites allow you to restore or change the color of weathered decking. There's just a year or two. You can also use a standard solid-color acrylic deck stain and get 3 to 5 years of service. High-traffic areas may need more frequent attention.

Stains: Mowbray's Composite Deck Finish; Always Use mowbrays.com



Going for shine

For a better worthy of a fine penit, choose a translucent film-forming finish. Spar varnish has been the traditional choice for this effect, but it's a bear to apply and maintain. Sikken's two-part Gel Coat Deck Finish (sikkens.com), shown above, offers the same look but with a film that's more breathable and flexible, and it has more sun-blocking pigments than a varnish. Brushing on a rainwater seal is easier, too. Just wash it, and apply the new finish when it dries.



Stains in color

Semitransparent and solid-color stains come in scores of hues, giving your home a painted look that's a cinch to maintain. Follow along for a gallery of vibrantly stained, curb-appeal-boosting clapboards, shingles, and trim.



Flood T&F. Seen in Blue Shale; flood.com

➔ **hunter green.** From a distance, this Craftsman influenced home looks painted, but closer inspection reveals a gleaming, semitransparent sheen on its cedar clapboards. This no-penetrating stain recovers the appearance of being aged, a nod to its long history in the wood and sailing. Care is minimal: just wash and a recoat every five years. Clapboard stain similar to shown.



Cabot's Endorse Solid Color Stain in Cape Certified on trim and DeckSaver Maintenance Solid Transparent Stain in Cedar Mill on decking and siding; cabots.com

➔ **rich red.** A rich trim color can highlight a house's best features. Here, a solid color acrylic stain accents this contemporary home, contrasting with white windows and dramatically coating weathered Shaker Williams's Maintenance Solid Color Stain in Cape Certified on trim and DeckSaver Maintenance Solid Transparent Stain in Cedar Mill on decking and siding; cabots.com



olympic stain in Woodwork on the vertical boards; olympic.com

➔ **dark blue.** Having two types of siding offers an opportunity to use two different stains. Here, the shingles show off their natural hue under a clear finish, while the boards and batten get a low-maintenance solid-color stain. Olympic Maximum Water-Proofing Stain in Cedar Mill is on the shingles, and Maximum Solid Color acrylic stain in Woodwork on the vertical boards; olympic.com



Cabot's Endorse Solid Color Stain in Gray Moss, the trim; store White cabinet; cabots.com



Get gray without decay

Uncoated siding in coastal areas naturally turns a soft driftwood color after years of exposure to the sun and salt air. To accelerate this process without leaving siding susceptible to rot, Cabot developed a product called Bleaching Oil back in the late 1800s. Basically, it's a slightly pigmented, sandbar-repairment oil-based stain that contains a special bleaching agent. Once it's brushed onto raw, uncoated softwood siding, such as cedar, fir, or cypress, the surface changes to a light gray in about 8 months to a year. Recoat every 3 to 5 years. ■



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askthisoldhouse

FORCED-AIR FILTERS

FLOOD STOPPERS

GRANITE SEALERS

MORE



35
tips, tricks, and
answers to
your home-
improvement
questions

Q When's the best time to rototill my garden?

[illegible]

A True may not equal to solid! If all your soil has the right pH, a good balance of organic matter and salinity and fully a power tiller or a manual cabdriver like the one shown at left, can actually work the soil so structure and moisture are healthy. But if a soil test shows that amendments have to be added, tillage does make sense. Till when the till is damp not wet or dry. Just require some in your hand. If it holds its shape when you open your fist, it's a moist. If it crumbles, it's too dry. If it cracks apart, it's a need to cultivate.

Study 2



PHOTOGRAPH BY
JOSEF P. CANT

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Our cast of veteran experts

TOM SILVA
General ContractorNORM ABRAM
Master CarpenterRICHARD TRETHEWEY
Plumbing and Heating ExpertROGER COOK
Landscape ContractorADAM CARBONE
Host

Despite daily dusting and vacuuming, and frequent changes of the forced-air filter, the inside of my house is covered in dirt. Could the ducts running through the dirt-floor crawl space be to blame? —RONDA MENDEL ATLANTA



Richard Trethewey replies: Yes, they certainly are the prime suspect in this case. When air moves through the ducts, the pressure inside those ducts, and if those ducts aren't properly sealed, that low-pressure sucks in dust, insects, radon gas, or whatever else happens to be airborne nearby.

To prevent this from happening, every joint and connection in the system must be sealed either with aluminum-foil duct tape or a duct sealer, like RCD's #8 mastic (sold online at rehabmate.com). Never use plain gray duct tape—it's just for a lot of things but not for sealing ducts. Also, check all the connections to floor registers to make sure they're tight too. By the way, taking care of leaky ducts can also improve the efficiency of your system by up to 20 percent, so there's another good reason to seal them up.

Once your ducts are sealed, make sure the system has an effective filter. Those inexpensive see-through filters just won't do the job, no matter how many times you replace them—instead, you need a high-efficiency pleated media filter with a minimum efficiency rating value (MERV) of 9 to 12. Ask your HVAC company to recommend the best one for your system, you don't want to

Richard Trethewey removes a standard furnace filter so that he can put in the more effective pleated media filter (at left).

install one that makes the blower motor work too hard. Make sure the new filter fits snugly in its tray so that dust and dirt can't sneak past.

One last thing: Vacuuming can throw a lot of dust into the air. Unless you have a vacuum cleaner with a high-efficiency HEPA filter or a whole-house central vac, some of the dirt you pick up is just going to be spread around again.

TRIMMING A STUCK DOOR

There are two old wood doors in our entryway that constantly stick. What can we do to make them fit properly? —DAVE SMITH CHICAGO

Tom Silva replies: Excess wood doors more the issue because they're supposed to change with weather. The solution is to trim a little bit off the sides of the doors with a hand plane. How much you need to take off depends on the time of year you do the work. If you trim off too much when the doors are swollen, the gap between door and jamb will end up being too big when the doors shrink.

Here's a rule of thumb: When a door is dry, usually in midwinter after the heat has been on for a while, trim it so that a metal will clip between the door's edge and the jamb. When a door is swollen, shave it down just enough so that a dime will fit between them. Once the door shrinks, the clearance will be the thickness of a nail.

To trim a door, remove it from the hinges, brace it, and use a hand plane to shave just enough wood off the latch side edge to stop the sticking. If you have to plane in the vicinity of the latch, remove the latch plate and its screws. Bevel the edge toward the inside by a degree or two so that it will clear the jamb.



YARD FLOODING

Seems like our backyard floods every time we get a good rain and the water stands for days. This was not always a problem, but it seems to get worse every year. Why is this happening and what can I do to solve the problem? —WHYME PERAIN WILLOREBURG, OHIO

Roger Cook replies: Water runs downhill, so look uphill for the source of the problem. It could be that someone added a new impervious surface, such as a driveway or patio. Or perhaps a drain is clogged or someone changed the grade of their lawn or pointed downspouts in your direction. Try to solve the problem as its source. If you can't, here are two things you can do:

(1) Raise the level of your lawn. The next time it floods, mark the edges of the flooded area with stakes.

Then, after the water is gone, cut out the sodding grass and resod the area to level the soil. Add enough loam to raise the grade, but no more than 4 inches or you risk killing any trees by compressing their roots. Finally, reseed the area. The new elevated grade will push water in some other direction, so be sure it's a place that can drain quickly and won't flood a neighboring yard or basement.

(2) As an alternative, put a couple of dry wells in the area. A dry well is basically an empty barrel with a tap, no bottom, and holes in its side. It captures surface water and holds it underground, giving it time to disperse into the surrounding soil. The plastic versions are easy to work with and relatively inexpensive. You'll need to dig a hole about 4 feet deep and 4 feet wide for each well, preferably in a location with fair drainage, sandy soil; clay soil drains more slowly. Line the hole with filter fabric to keep out dirt, then shovel in a 6-inch thick bed of clean ¾- to 1-inch drainage stone. Place the dry well on the stone bed.



If property runoff is not the cause of regular flooding, the solution is to raise the grade a few inches or install one dry well. (See Page 40.)

Also, the door fits correctly, reduce moisture absorption by sealing any bare wood with paint or a clear finish.

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acrid fill in around it with more stone. Lay a French-drain pipe from the dry well to a 4-inch-square ground-level grate at a low spot in the lawn. Your yard should be a lot dryer after the next rainstorm.

Q BEST CLOTH FOR OUTDOOR USES

Our gazebos have fabric roofs that are either bottomed or missing. My husband thinks we should replace them with metal roofing. Can you give us some ideas on what to do?

—JEAN BRUGEMAN, SCOTTSDALE, ARIZ.

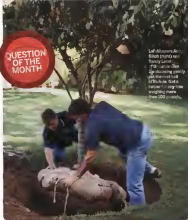
Kevin O'Connor replies: Unless your gazebos are completely shaded, metal roofing may not be the best idea in your climate. Anyone sitting below the roof when the sun hits it is going to feel it in the heat radiating off the metal. Fabric tops will keep the gazebos much cooler than metal roofing, though you'll have to replace them eventually.

According to Bally Morgan, president of Beacon Fabric & Net in Lakeland, Florida, the best cloth for this application is a woven acrylic, sometimes called among or marine fabric. The alternatives—cotton, polyester, and nylon—all deteriorate quickly in the sun. Cotton and linen are also prone to mildew. Woven acrylics, on the other hand, stand up extremely well to UV radiation and water; they're breathable and mildew resistant, and they come in many colors.

If you can sew, you can make your own tops using a standard sewing machine with a number 18 jeans needle. Morgan recommends using a UV-resistant "bonded" nylon or polyester thread, which will hold up to the sun better than threads made of a standard cotton or "soft" nylon or polyester.

Morgan admits that even the

QUESTION OF THE MONTH



Left: All-American Brick (left) and Randy Lantz, 70, of the Blue Ridge Association, are installing a new roof on the roof of the Blue Ridge Association building. Right: A man and a woman are installing a new roof on the roof of the Blue Ridge Association building.

Q I'd like to purchase a small tree. What's the proper way to plant it?

—MARIA COSTA, HOLMBOEK, MASS.

Kirk Hren, Groundworks Landscaping Inc., replies: The harder part about planting any tree is moving it. A 4- to 6-foot tree with its root ball could easily weigh 200 pounds or more. If you plan on planting it yourself, have the garden center where you buy

pick a tree that's easier to handle or deliver it to your house right where you want to plant it.

Make sure the site you select is at least 15 feet from the house, power lines, and other trees. And before you start digging, be sure to call 811. You'll be put in touch with a local service company that marks the location of any buried utility lines for free, saving you from any costly surprises.

Once those details are taken care of, proceed with the steps on the next page. You'll have a lot of labor left to pay off handsomely with a choice in each aspect that will only get better with time.

Cost: \$70 for fertilizer and mulch.

Time: 2-4 hours.

Difficulty: Takes lots of muscle. If the tree weighs more than 200 pounds, hire a landscaper contractor or get a helper.

STEP-BY-STEP

Planting a tree

1. Dig the hole

Dig a hole 1 foot in diameter for every 1 inch of trunk diameter, and 2 inches shallower than the distance from the bottom of the root ball to the root flare, where the trunk emerges from the ball. If you can't see the flare, put back some of the dirt ball. Knip back the roots with a shovel handled across the hole and a measuring tape.



3. Backfill with soil

Rotate the tree until its best side faces the street, if it's on the front yard, or the house, if it's on the backyard. Cut away the wire basket to at least 6 inches below the root ball's shoulder, and pull back the burlap. Use a cutwater to remove the soil around the root ball. Backfill with the excavated soil up to grade. Tamp lightly to get you packing to eliminate any air pockets.

2. Amend the soil

Four to 4.5 inches of mulch into the backfill and blend it in. Do not overfertilize with only the amount listed on the bag for your soil's pH rate. Now gently roll the tree into the hole and set it upright.



4. Water and mulch

Form a 6-inch-high soil dam around the base of the hole. Fill the hole with water. Knock down the lip after the water has been absorbed. Add mulch to about 3 inches deep all around the tree, but pull it away from the trunk to discourage rot. Keep the weeds dead by wrapping a 1-inch-wide water bag or two around the trunk (bring it close). Fertilize once a week for the next two years.

ask the oldhouse

best outdoor fabric won't last forever. In your climate you might have to stretch the tops after five years and replace them entirely after 10 or 15 years.

BUST IN THE WATER

When my mother leaves her Florida every winter, she always shuts off the well pump to prevent flooding if a pipe breaks. Last year when she returned, her water had rust for the first time. Will dumping bleach into the well take care of it?

—ROBERTA MOON, DANEBURG, N.Y.

Richard Trethewey replies: Nope. Bleach will sanitize a well contaminated with organic material, but it won't remove rust.

It's possible that water coming out over the winter has caused something to rust. If it doesn't dissipate after running the water, start looking inside the house for other sources. Galvanized supply pipes are likely culprits, but if the already has copper or PEX pipes, then maybe it's her hot water tank. Draining and flushing the tank might help, but flushing may cause a more serious leak. The tank will soon need to be replaced.

If neither the pipes nor the tank are rusty, rust is probably coming out of the well. To stop it, put an iron filter on the water line where it enters the house.

send your questions to ask the oldhouse

Go to asktheoldhouse.com/asktheoldhouse or write to: Ask This Old House, This Old House magazine, 135 West 50th Street, New York, NY 10020.

Include a return address and daytime phone number. The magazine editors will be happy to get to the bottom of your question. We'll do our best to answer your question, but we can't guarantee that we'll be able to answer every question. We'll do our best to answer every question. We'll do our best to answer every question.



Norm's tricks of the trade

I'm building some walls for a basement rec room that will be covered with vertical paneling. How should I install the horizontal blocking that supports it? —*STEVE SMITH, CONCORD, N.H.*

A filling in gaps of 2x molding between the studs is useful for painting. It also helps when half walls are needed and helps in attaching cabinets, drawers, and other wall hardware in a bathroom or kitchen. Use these tricks to simplify the process.



1 Measure and cut each piece of blockboard separately because there will be slight variations in the spaces between studs. To get accurate measurements, take them near the top or bottom of the wall. If you take them halfway up the wall, a basement beam stud will throw you off.

2 The trick will now be to get the notebinder Snap wired-chalk line across the face of the wall where you want it. We'll do this by using Non-Slapper (the blocks above) and below the line. This allows you to not drag it through the cluttered interior of walls of notebinders which is much easier than installing them if they were on a straight line. If you need continuous run of blocking—in here hanging notebinders, for example—just knock out a large hole in the wall and shove



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This fall GMC Sierra and Ask This Old House teamed up to host a national search for homeowners looking for an innovative solution to a problem in their home. The Grand Prize winner would receive a house call from the crew of Ask This Old House, a chance at a lifetime choice to call any time our experts for what ails their home, but also to be featured on our nationally televised show on PBS.

We received more than 5,000 inquiries from across the U.S. ranging from the standard Jimmy Kimmel to the truly innovative (including a wind turbine). It was a tough decision, but our producers selected **Mr. John Kales** of Pearl River, N.Y., as the lucky Grand Prize winner. As the winner, received plumbing and heating support, a Raymond 500 Series boiler and, best of all, a Stanley 100 Series 100-gal. tankless water heater to help Mr. Kales replace his old inefficient hot water heater with a brand new super efficient Eco Hybrid water heater. (The applicants are: www.fox10.net) Mr. Kales and 5 runners up also received a Stanley FatMax® 32-in. x 24-in. truck box (storage tools came with \$250 worth of Stanley tools).



Congratulations to Mr. Kalins, and our thanks to all who joined us.

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Event Spotlight

Our House kicked off the 2010 International Builders' Show in Las Vegas with our annual packed reception at House of Blues. Thanks to everyone who joined us for an evening of great food and music with our editors and the crew from This Old House. We ask: *How Old House?* thisoldhouse.com



1997). The authors also found that the effect of the number of children on the mother's employment was not significant in the multivariate model. This may be due to the small number of children in the sample (only 10 children were aged 10 years or older).



1. *Chlorophyll a* and *Chlorophyll b*
 2. *Carotenoids*
 3. *Xanthophylls*
 4. *Phycobilins*
 5. *Phaeophytins*
 6. *Phaeopigments*
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The history: Built in 1894 when General Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee invaded Orange County, Virginia, for the bloody Battle of the Wilderness, this house—about 20 miles up the road from the scene of the carnage—was just three years old. It was typical of Greek Revival farmhouses built here in the mid-1800s for families who earned a living farming tobacco, grain, and livestock. Now it's a kind of ghostly relic you drive by and wonder about. In 1994 someone bought the place and hired a design firm to draw up renovation plans, but the work was never done. Last year Clarence and Margaret Gill bought the place and its surrounding acreage to farm. Since they already have a home of their own, they're looking for someone to move the house and restore it.

Why save it? The seven-room Greek Revival dates to the Civil War era, with a graceful double-height porch outside and a handsome gallery inside, as well as unusual Italianate roof brackets and decorative scrollwork on the staircase. **What it needs:** New plumbing, electrical, and HVAC systems. The clipboard riding next to be painted the chimney reported and the metal roof replaced. It's a big job, but it's a chance to bring a unique piece of old farm-house back to life—and even pick the spot to set it on.

—RETHA PANDOLF



Got a house? *By Margaret Gill*
Built in 1894 and abandoned for decades, this 7,000-sq-ft house is in need of a new owner. Gill is looking for someone to move the house and restore it.

1 The 7,000-square-foot Greek Revival has a double-height porch with a gabled roof.
2 Italianate roof brackets may have been added later. The porch columns are in dire need of restoration.
3 The interior features a two-story gallery with a scrollwork staircase. The striped left wall is new plaster.
4 Decorative scrollwork on the staircase is in need of restoration.



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